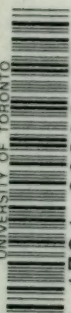


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GORDON CRAIG AND THE THEATRE



GORDON CRAIG, 1928

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GORDON CRAIG AND THE THEATRE

A RECORD AND AN INTERPRETATION

BY
ENID ROSE

263021
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LONDON
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DEDICATORY

HE found a theatre absurd and pitiable in an ugliness born of lack of imagination and out of æsthetic darkness. He found a stage that was a disgrace to the beautiful drama it was occasionally called upon to harbour. He found a drama itself that cried out against its cruel and ignorant confinement in surroundings that cramped and distorted and vitiated it. These things, that other men seemed to be unaware of, this man found and saw. And out of a fancy, an inventiveness, a beauty and a skill of mind that had not been given to the theatre before him, he fashioned a theatre, a stage, and even a drama that we until his time had not known. A new theatre sprang into being. A new stage shone out before the world's eyes. And drama that had been bound in fetters of incomprehension was suddenly released and given wings. This man, alone and opposed by a theatre with eyes that could not see, accomplished, against sneer, against blindness, against vituperation even, all this. His spirit is present on every stage to-day that makes any claim to resourcefulness, to dignity, and to grandeur.

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Mr. Alban Dobson and the Oxford University Press for permission to quote the poem of Austin Dobson, *When Burbage Played*, Messrs. J. M. Dent and Sons as publishers of *Towards a New Theatre, Woodcuts and Some Words*, Henry Irving, and the many writers and owners of copyright whose kindness has assisted in the making of this record.

E. R.

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PART ONE
WORK IN ENGLAND

GORDON CRAIG AND THE THEATRE

I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

IN 1862, Ellen Terry, then a young girl, was acting at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, in a company which included her sister, Kate, and a number of players who were afterwards to delight England.

In one of the local papers there appeared, under the headline "Jottings", some unusually intelligent comments on the performances of the company. Ellen Terry cut out all these notes, read them many times, and thought them all very clever, most amusing—and generally right. Later, as she has recounted in her autobiography, she discovered that the writer was E. W. Godwin, who was then of local celebrity as an architect and an archæologist. She had already made his acquaintance and had taken part in some Shakespearean readings at his home in Bristol of which she says: "This house, with its Persian rugs, beautiful furniture, its organ, which for the first

time I learned to love, its sense of design in every detail, was a revelation to me, and the talk of its master and mistress made me *think*. At the theatre, I was living in an atmosphere which was developing my powers as an actress and teaching me what work meant, but my mind had begun to grasp, dimly and almost unconsciously, that I must do something for myself—something that all the education and training I was receiving in my profession could not do for me. I was fourteen years old at Bristol, but now I felt that I had never really lived at all before. For the first time I began to appreciate beauty, to observe, to feel the splendour of things, to *aspire!*”

This early friend of Ellen Terry, who taught her how to think and to aspire (besides designing her costumes and teaching her how to wear them), deserves a fame in the history of the theatre which had not yet been given him. Edward William Godwin, contemporaneously with Wagner, led the research and experiment which have to-day grown into a world-wide movement to establish the art of the theatre on principle rather than on policy.

Ellen Terry's son, Edward Gordon Craig, seems to have been destined from birth to take up the leadership at the point at which Godwin's strength failed. It becomes a matter of great interest, therefore, to learn what is to be known of the initial work of E. W. Godwin.

Godwin was born in Bristol on May 26, 1833. The earliest influence which he could remember was his father's garden, which was surrounded by all sorts of curiosities—cusped fragments and quaint crumbling bits from old churches. While still a boy he showed a mastery of the standard work on Gothic architecture. On leaving school, he found himself in the office of a civil engineer, into which came a good deal of architectural work, and before long he had constituted himself the architect of the place. On leaving this office, his first commission was to build a school. He afterwards went on a visit to a brother in Ireland, and stayed for two years building a little church and a few houses. Then he returned to Bristol and went into partnership.

He became a devoted reader of the works of Ruskin, and he entered a competition for the designing of a new Town Hall for Northampton “determined to fight it on *The Stones of Venice*.” William Tite was the adjudicator and gave the award to Godwin. The Town Hall was completed in 1864. “Architecture must be logical or it is nothing,” he told himself, and this principle he brought into theatrical art when later he honoured our theatre with his guidance.

On the death of his first wife, Godwin moved his home from Bristol to London, where he had a branch of his business. His interest in the history of the theatre and the drama, as well as

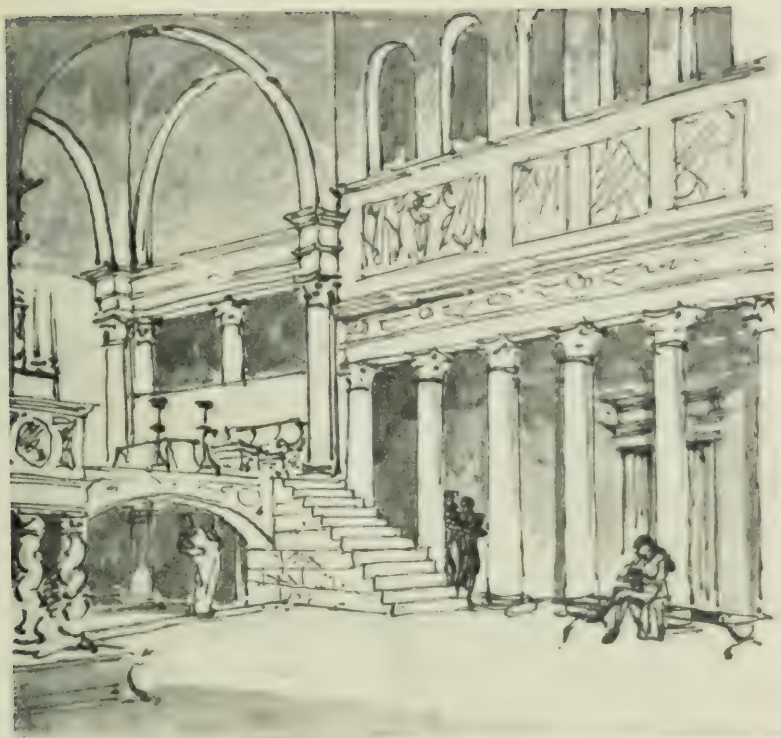
his desire to put his knowledge and beliefs into practice, diverted him from his usual architectural work—to the regret of some who saw that he had it in him to become the first architect of the time.

In including scenography and the theory and practice of theatrical art in his studies, he differed from most of his contemporaries in architecture, but he showed his kinship with Brunelleschi, Peruzzi, Raphael, Serlio, Palladio, Sabbatini and a host of Renaissance Italians, with the later Bernini, with Inigo Jones and John Vanbrugh, to all of whom it had seemed in the natural order of things to pass from architecture to theatrical art.

He was one of the first in modern times to be aware that a most remarkable eagerness in scenic study characterised the Europe of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; he was aware that the early scholars of Italy, interested in the revival of the drama, accepted scenery, on the basis of classical authority, as inherent in the presentation.

While these artists had enjoyed the patronage of King, Queen, or Pope, the commercial age put upon Godwin the strain of a bitter fight for the materials of his art.

On settling in London, he renewed his friendship with Ellen Terry, who was now acting at the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, from which, in 1868, she quietly eloped to live in retirement from



DESIGN FOR A CHURCH SCENE
Probably for *Much Ado About Nothing*
By E. W. Godwin, F.S.A.

the stage for the next six years, in the village of Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Here her two children were born: her daughter in 1869, and her son in 1872—January 16.

“Of course I thought my children the most brilliant and beautiful children in the world,” says Ellen Terry, “and, indeed, ‘this side idolatry’ they were exceptional, and they had an exceptional bringing up.” The surroundings of their childhood were all calculated to make them vividly appreciative of beauty and acutely sensitive to the ugliness of the “realistic and common”. That such a training was perhaps to doom them to a large proportion of suffering in a world of growing mechanisation seems not to have occurred to the loving mother, or perhaps she trusted to the law of compensation.

Ellen Terry returned to the stage, in 1874, to act in Charles Reade’s play *The Wandering Heir*. Her children were left in the country at first, but were brought to London a year later when their mother went to play, for the first time, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, at the Prince of Wales Theatre, under the management of the Bancrofts. To this production E. W. Godwin gave “valuable aid in archæological research”—so the programme records. It has since been realised that in doing so he laid the foundations of a very successful period of Shakespearean production, though the public recognition and reward went to others.

Godwin's aid was at first hastily questioned by a startled little group of critics who had been misled into a belief that Shakespeare's plays were originally acted with puritanical austerity on a bare platform and with the use of "placards" to indicate the scene and the changes of scene in the action. These critics were scandalised by the visible beauty of the production, and protested that the only beauty proper to a Shakespearean performance was the beauty of "the spoken word".

Ellen Terry, when she came to play Portia, thanks to Godwin's guidance, knew, "Not only every word of the part, but every detail of that period of Venetian splendour in which the action of the play takes place". She knew the gain to her imagination from that knowledge. Her performance was allowed to be none the worse for it, but the play as a whole failed. The mistake was in the casting of the part of Shylock but the blame was put on "the pictures".

This same year Godwin published in *The Architect* a series of articles on "The Architecture and Costume of Shakespeare's Plays," which were a source of information to the managers of London in the years that followed.

The one critic on whose perception Godwin could always count was Oscar Wilde, whose essay, "The Truth of Masks", contains the best contemporary appreciation of the work which Godwin

did for the theatre. Godwin's own criticisms of the London stage run through the numbers of *The British Architect* under "Notes on Currents Events", where they find a place beside the building news of the week. He is found there commenting on Irving's announcement that, for the production of *Hamlet* for the first time under his own management at the Lyceum, he intended to disregard archæology. Godwin made the suggestion (for which he apologised the following week) that the motive must be to save the archæologist's fee, he having had experience of the reluctance of theatre managements to pay for advice with anything more than free passes.

"Let the play be presented in the modern costume of to-day, or in the costume of Shakespeare's day, or in the costume of Hamlet's day, but in the name of all the ages spare us an invented costume whether by Mr. Irving or another." This must not be taken to mean that he undervalued imaginative design, but he insisted that the imaginative had to be arrived at through knowledge of the actual. It was for the archæologist to supply the facts which the artist must transmute into effects, so Wilde expressed the argument for him.

He would allow that a production might be on one plane or on another, but insisted that it should be consistent and not a medley, a *pastiche*; it should be a clear reflection of reality or wholly imaginative.

His own productions were on the first plane; Gordon Craig, following after him, chose the imaginative plane towards which Irving's scenic assistants and costumiers were sometimes striving without quite arriving.

When Godwin helped the actor, Hermann Vezin, and later Wilson Barrett, in the production of *Hamlet*, he placed it in the period to which the story refers, "When England's cicatrice looked raw and red after the Danish sword"—at the beginning of the eleventh century.

In the notes of 1879, he is found urging the desirability of the foundation of a school for actors. An article of his in 1878, proposes "A New Scheme for a Theatre". He sums up the faults of the buildings of London and the reforms needed to correct them. He calls for the abolition of footlights (which at that time were not counter-acted by other lights as they are to-day). He would have built-scenes with a simple mechanism for changing, in place of the scenes painted on wings and he wants to make an end of "fudged perspective". He proposes that a model theatre should be built, and estimates its cost, including a freehold in a central part of London, at £26,000, and, of course, he was writing with experience of building costs.

He did not achieve this theatre but he gave more and more of his time to producing plays. His work for Wilson Barrett's presentation of

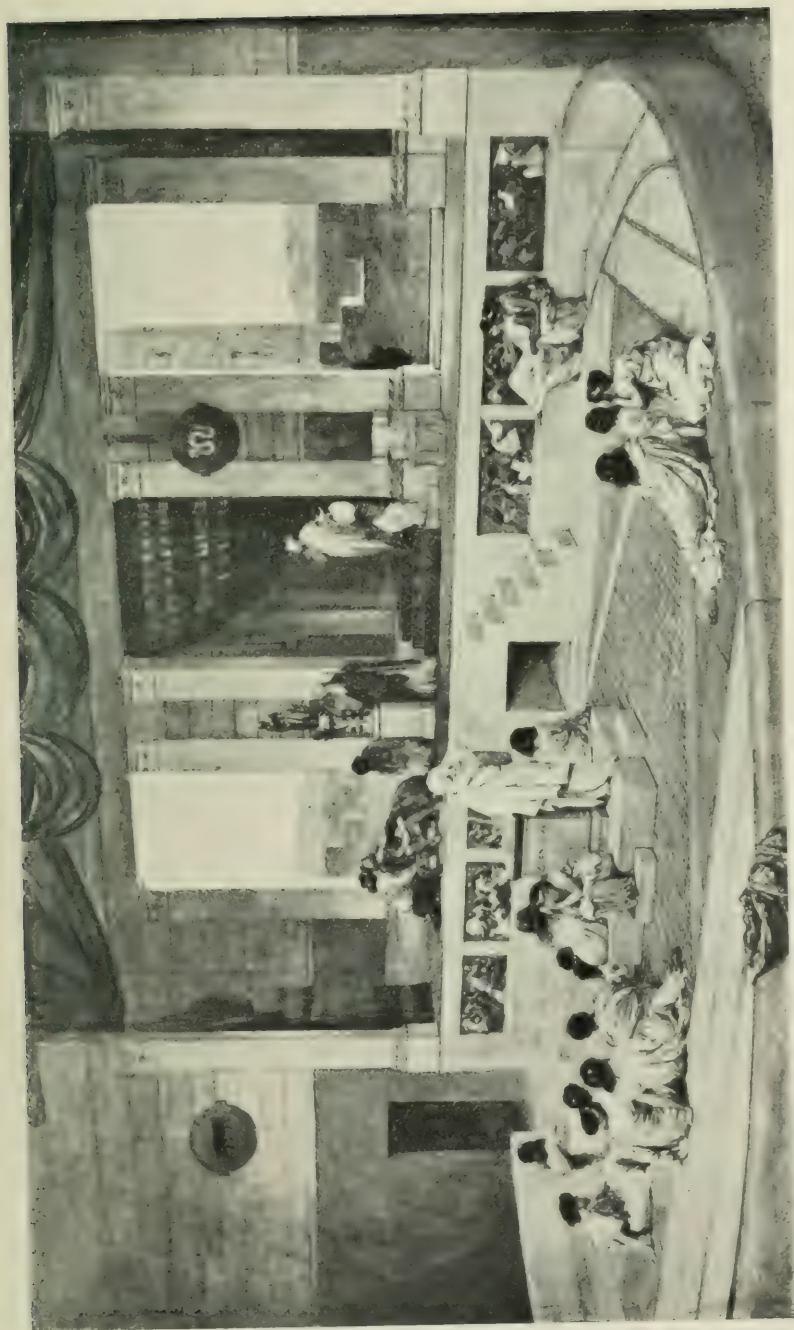
Claudian rivalled that of the artist-scholars of a sixteenth-century Accademia. He designed the costumes and properties for a production of *As You Like It*, which was given as a pastoral at the home of Lady Archibald Campbell, Coombe Wood, Wimbledon. He also revived *The Faithful Shepherdess* of Fletcher. He continued to design costumes and properties for Ellen Terry, those for *The Cup* being most memorable.

His most ambitious achievement was the construction of a temporary Greek theatre within Hengler's Circus, and the production within it of *Helena in Troas*, a play by John Todhunter, 17th May, 1886. He thus anticipated the circus experiments of Reinhardt by many years. In this production Herbert Beerbohm Tree played the part of Paris. He acknowledged, many years later, that from Godwin he learned much that he was able to turn to account in his own management.

With this production and two others at the Opéra Comique which he undertook in the following months, Godwin overtaxed his strength and aggravated an illness from which he died in October of that year.

It was said that his life had been "for the most part one of unfulfilled promise", and this in spite of the fact that he had so recently given London one of the most beautiful sights that had ever been seen there. The promise was clear—the fulfilment is yet to be.

He was too much of an individualist to be altogether popular with the democratically-minded who took democracy to mean a levelling of mankind. All men are equal in that they belong to the human species and not some to a lower one, but as men they are unequal and must take their place in a hierarchy. Godwin ranked a thinking, accomplished artist with the masters, with princes and nobles. Mock humbleness had no charms or meaning for him. He had an imperious manner which small-minded men regarded as an assumption, but to which the best of his contemporaries recognised his right. "Although he was neither painter nor sculptor," wrote one of these, "yet so well had he mastered their relationship with architecture, that he might be said to belong to all three branches of art, and in that sense he resembled the Renaissance artists. As became a man who had made a speciality of Gothic, he was an archæologist, but not in the usual sense of that word. For him the past was something more than a mouldering skeleton. It lived for him, and buildings were only a background for figures. It was an easy transition when Edward Godwin passed from architecture to the fourteenth-century poems of Chaucer, and when he passed from the study of Shakespeare's characters to the buildings in which they were supposed to live. He was learned without having a particle of Dryasdust about him. As an architect he was



HELENA IN TROAS

As Produced by E. W. Godwin, F.S.A., 17 May, 1886.

The principal characters, from left to right, are Paris (H. Beerbohm Tree), Hecuba (Miss Roche), Priam (Hermann Vezin), Helena (Miss Alma Murray), Helena's Attendant (Mrs. Oscar Wilde).
 Reproduced from the original water-colour, by kind permission of the artist, Mr. H. M. Paget, and of the owner, Mrs. John Todhunter.

less fortunate than his friend Burges in obtaining opportunities to prove his powers, and his best designs are to be found only on paper. There is enough of them to show that he could impart grace to small as well as to large works."

In London, he carried out the premises of the Fine Art Society in Bond Street and the studio for Princess Louise at Kensington Palace, where Alfred Gilbert has lately been at work. He helped Burges with designs for the new Law Courts, which architects of to-day think more admirable than those of Street which were accepted. With Edis, he designed the Houses of Parliament, Berlin.

He had a great knowledge of furniture of all periods, and of costumes and fabrics. It was partly in response to his urgency that Arthur Liberty founded the now famous business. He was an illuminating lecturer on Shakespeare and other subjects, speaking extemporaneously and with ease. In a circle of famous talkers he was one of the most charming and persuasive. He gave much of his thought to the planning of art education, and his *Letters to Art Students* show his masterly intellect and at the same time his sympathy with the aspirations of youth.

He championed the art of Whistler when most of the art world abused it. Of the many houses in Chelsea which he designed, the home of Whistler, "The White House" in Tite Street, was the

subject of much comment. Everything that Whistler did was held to be "outrageous" or "eccentric", and it was thought that his house must be likewise. The rumoured quarrels of the artist and his friend, the architect, gave excitement to the air while it was being built. When life in it proved unsuccessful and it was sold up, Whistler lived up to his reputation as a wit by writing over the door, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. E. W. Godwin F.S.A. built this one."

In spite of any occasional disagreements, the friendship of the two remained strong, and Whistler was at his champion's side when, in 1886, Godwin died.

In 1878, Ellen Terry had played the name-part in *Olivia* at the Court Theatre, and her children had "walked on" to the stage for the first time. The child who was to grow up and to carry on and carry forward the work begun by Godwin therefore became at home in the air of the theatre at the early age of six. The family were living at Longridge Road, Earl's Court, and had a tiny cottage at Hampton Court at the time. When not engaged at the theatre, the children spent much of their time playing in the garden of the Palace. They acted scenes from *As You Like It* for their own amusement and for that of the custodians, and became practised in an art which was theirs by inheritance. At other times

the boy exercised his gift for drawing, and he had constantly a pencil in his hand.

While acting in *Olivia* Ellen Terry received her first letter from Henry Irving, and he shortly afterwards called upon her to discuss her engagement at the Lyceum Theatre, of which he was now becoming the responsible manager. Irving soon became the idolised friend of the children and a lasting influence in their lives. As she advanced in fame, Ellen Terry won the love and admiration of all the artists of the time, and her son and daughter grew up in acquaintance with the personalities and work of the pre-Raphaelites, of Alfred Gilbert, of Walter Crane, and of the outstanding writers.

While the Lyceum Company were making an American tour, in 1885, a Chicago journalist chronicled of the youthful performer of the part of Joey, the gardener's boy, in *Eugene Aram*:

His eyes are full of sparkle, his smile is a ripple over his face, and his laugh is as cheery and natural as a bird's song. . . . This Joey is Miss Ellen Terry's son, and the apple of her eye. On this Wednesday night, January 14, 1885, he spoke his first lines upon the stage. His mother has high hopes of this child's dramatic future. He has the instinct and the soul of art in him. Already the theatre is his home. His postures and his playfulness with the gardener, his natural and graceful movements, had been the subject of much drilling, of study and of practice. He acquitted

himself beautifully and received the wise congratulations of his mother, of Mr. Irving, and of the company.

On his return to England, the boy became a pupil at Bradfield College, where he formed a lifelong friendship with Paul Cooper, who is now a distinguished architect and silver worker, the designer and maker of the memorial to Ellen Terry in St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. From Bradfield, he proceeded to Heidelberg College in the year of its foundation, 1887. At both colleges he was under the guardianship of the Hon. Stephen Coleridge.

Dr. Holzberg, the principal of Heidelberg, remembers him as a boy of lively and impulsive temper, already devoted to art which he preferred to mathematics (although the only prize he won was in this subject). He was recognised as a talented pupil, who found little difficulty with his general studies while he was also athletic. He picked up German very easily, and this was afterwards to be of use to him in work and friendship. At the suggestion of his mother and of Henry Irving, Dr. Holzberg read Shakespeare with him privately, once or twice a week, and the master was struck with the high intelligence of the youthful student and the readiness with which he caught the spirit of the plays.

"Teddy enthusiastically admired his mother," writes Dr. Holzberg, "being proud of her won-



GORDON CRAIG
as a page in Irving's production of *Much Ado About Nothing*,
in New York, 1885. (Falk.)

derful success as an actress. She came to Heidelberg to place her daughter with a German family, and to pay a visit to the College, where I had the pleasure of welcoming her, and I well remember the great impression she made on me the first time I saw her. She had just been acting Gretchen in *Faust* at the Lyceum Theatre with ever growing success and, before I saw her, I was wondering how she managed so well, being the mother of almost grown-up children. I had not spoken with her for ten minutes when I understood how she carried away hundreds of people night after night in the great metropolis of London. She was so wonderfully simple and natural in her ways and manners that every one of the College was in love with her: masters, boys, and servants alike!"

Ellen Terry having married the actor, Charles Wardell (Charles Kelly), her son was known during his school and college days as Henry Edward Gordon Wardell, but on leaving Heidelberg, in 1889, the name of Edward Gordon Craig was adopted. (This name was legalised by deed-poll and an announcement of the fact appeared in *The Times* of February 24, 1893.)

As Gordon Craig he entered on his apprenticeship as an actor in the company of Irving at the Lyceum Theatre, London.

II

APPRENTICESHIP AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE

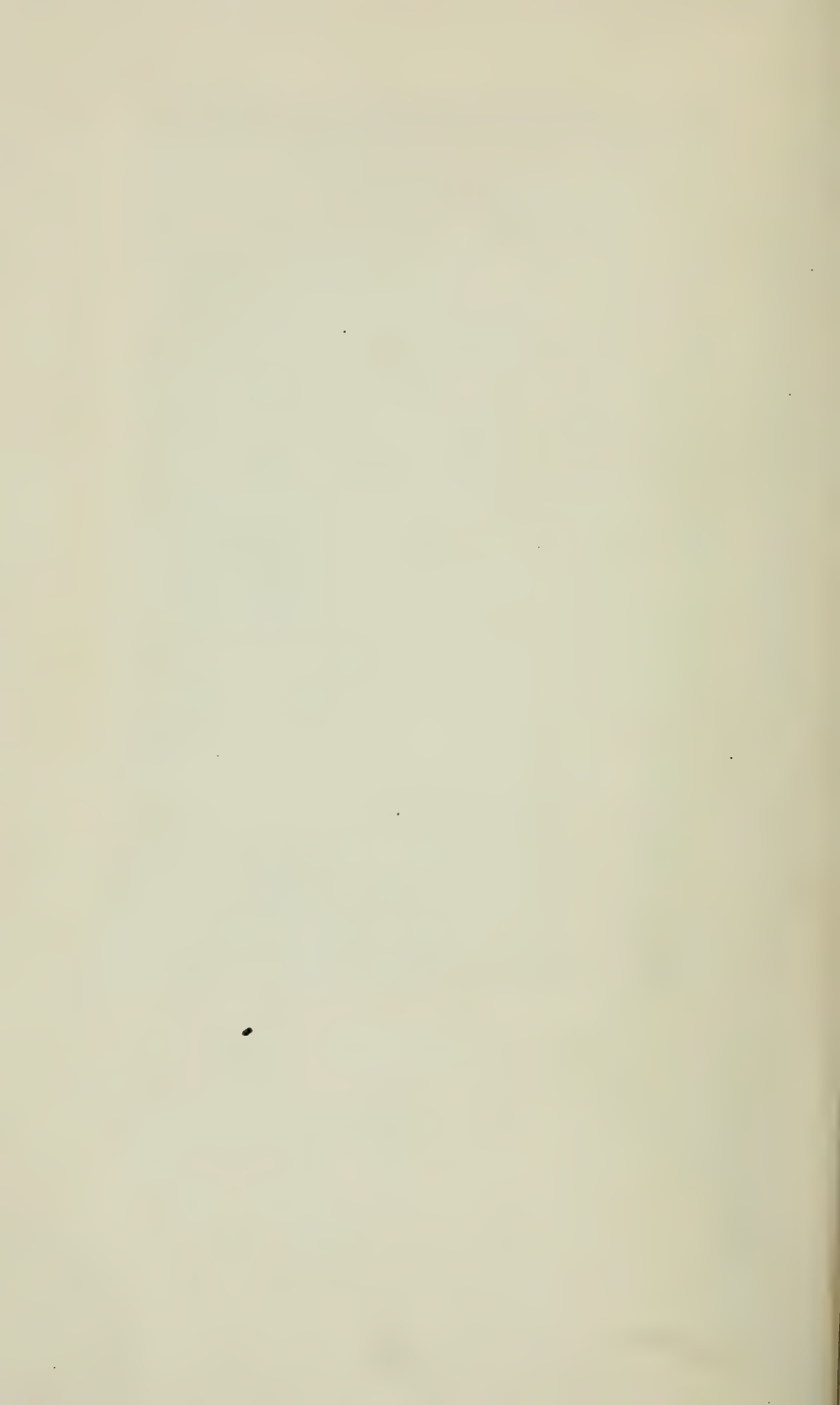
GORDON CRAIG made his appearance as the boy, Arthur St. Valery, in *The Dead Heart*, a play produced by Irving on September 28, 1889, when it was remarked that he "is a comely youth, the handsome son of a beautiful mother, whom he much resembles. It is but a small character, but the young actor made it stand out in intellect and picturesqueness. Mr. Craig will be well taught, and he has every advantage in his favour."

Irving arranged for him to have lessons in elocution from Walter Lacy, one of the best actors of the company, and from the recognised teacher of deportment, Signor Léon Espinosa.

In the following eight years, he acted at the Lyceum in *Ravenswood*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard the Third*, *The Lyons Mail*, *Nance Oldfield*, and *The Corsican Brothers*. The impressions which he made as an actor on such widely different critics as Bernard Shaw and Clement Scott can be read in the reprints of their first night reviews of these plays, in Shaw's *Dramatic*



ELLEN TERRY AND GORDON CRAIG
in *The Dead Heart*, at the Lyceum Theatre, 1889.



Opinions and Scott's From "The Bells" to "King Arthur".

During the months of the summer vacations, Martin Harvey and William Haviland, who were members of the Lyceum Company at the time, formed a troupe under their own management, with the blessing of their "chief" and with generous assistance from the Lyceum wardrobe and scene-store, and made a tour of provincial towns. In this company Gordon Craig gained further experience as an actor, and at the same time took every opportunity of practising drawing—in the theatre, the town, and the countryside. Irving himself chose the parts which his protégé should first perform—Caleb Deecie in *The Two Roses*, Biondello in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Glavis in *The Lady of Lyons*, Meynard in *The Corsican Brothers*, and Sir Almeric in *Iolanthe*. During 1891, he played the parts of Claudio, Mercutio, Modus, Charles Surface, Alexander Oldworthy, Moses, Lorenzo, Malcolm, Beauchamp, Meynard, and the Second Grave-Digger—a record which Ellen Terry regarded as remarkable for a boy of nineteen.

Perhaps with a reflection on his own sardonic temperament, Irving remarked of the young actor's performances, "Yes, my boy, *you* are genial". Geniality he had inherited from his mother, and his acting had her buoyant quality and poetic sensibility. He had also inherited an intellectuality which was not yet fully awake.

In 1893, having married that year, he went to live at Uxbridge. In a neighbouring village lived William Nicholson, the artist, and his brother-in-law, James Pryde. Nicholson taught Craig to cut the first ditch in a piece of boxwood. The charm of Crawhall's woodcuts and the masterly illustrations to *Trostspeigl* (1620) by an artist unknown, led him into a practice of this art. He has given an account of these days in his book, *Woodcuts and Some Words*:

"At that time it did not occur to me that I could do anything as a producer of plays, or that I should put my scrap of experience as a wood-engraver to any practical use. I was quite convinced that acting and make-up and costumes and the words were the be-all and end-all of the Art of the Theatre; and had you told me at that time that I should some day cease to act, I should have smiled the hearty and forgiving smile of youth at you, and laughed at your prediction. I saw everything in terms of the recently discovered foot-lights, and grease paints, the old wigs, whispers, roars, and the centre of the stage. . . . I was an actor, rather smitten with stage-managing, as smitten as any young fellow of to-day is; and stage-managing, at that time, meant to me being if possible a second Irving—without a struggle. It appealed to me as such a fine swaggery sort of job—to stand in the centre of the stage, surrounded

by a staff of stage-carpenters, electricians, costumiers, and actors and actresses, and to give the order to the Prompter to begin Act II, Scene I.

“‘Ladies and gentlemen for Act II, Scene I’, calls the prompter and hustles the call-boy—even runs out into the street to call them—and in troop the fine men and women, all looking grim or sunny according to their natures. But in those days I had not produced a play. Later on I came to see that standing in the middle of the stage and making others do the work is not the sole qualification for being a producer.”

(Gordon Craig first undertook the whole direction of a production when he organised a few performances at Uxbridge in December, 1893. On this occasion he produced an adaptation, which he made himself, from Alfred de Musset’s *On Ne Badine Pas Avec l’Amour*, and in which he acted the part of Perdican. This was followed by a comic drama by Benjamin Buckstone, *A Rough Diamond*, in which he played also. A note on the programme referring to the first play says that “The costumes are an exact reproduction of the clothes worn in the fourteenth century, and are made from designs by M. Viollet le Duc.” The producer had begun to make a thorough study of historic costume and scene. A second programme consisted of excerpts from *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Hunchback*, a repetition of *A Rough Diamond*,

in each item of which the young actor and manager took part.

From the responsibility of these performances he first began to realise that there were possibilities of an art of the theatre which had not yet been imagined, that the stage was "a still almost undiscovered land".

For a time he belonged to the company of Sarah Thorne at the Theatre Royal, Margate, a centre which had some repute as a training school. Here he had practice in stage-managing as well as in acting. Granville Barker was a recruit to the company and played Hastings to the Young Marlowe of Gordon Craig.

In September, 1894, Craig gained the experience of playing Romeo and, a few nights later, Hamlet, concerning which he wrote to a friend, "Hamlet's the work has put everything on one side as it should". In October he played Charles Surface taking "three hours to make-up and dress". During the following year he took the part of Cavaradosi in *La Tosca* on a provincial tour.

In 1895, from July 1 to 26, he acted in a round of plays, at Paisley, appearing as Julian Grey in *The New Magdalen*, Bager in *The Streets of London*, Armand in *Camille*, Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, and as Hamlet. In the same year he acted François Villon in a play of that name. In 1896, he acted in a stock season at the Opera House, Chatham, playing Petruchio in *The Taming*

of the *Shrew*, Fabien and Louis de Franchi in *The Corsican Brothers*, and the name parts in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The season lasted from February to May, and the leading actor received two pounds a week for his services. In July of that year, he played *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* at the Parkhurst Theatre, Holloway, London.

He was called upon, in 1897, to take up the part of *Hamlet* in Ben Greet's company at the Olympic Theatre, London, for six performances. This was owing to the illness of Nutcombe Gould who was to have played the part. Irving lent Gordon Craig his costume and dagger for the occasion, and was a highly interested spectator. The Hon. Gilbert Coleridge wrote of it years later as being, because of its youth, intellect, faultless elocution, and in particular its air of impromptu, the finest in his memory of many great performances of the part. (*Sunday Times*, August 19, 1923.) This reminder was provoked by the incredulity of the reviewer of Gordon Craig's book, *Scene*, who scoffed at the claim that the designer was primarily an actor and had never ceased to view the stage from the standpoint of acting and drama.

Writing of her son's performances Ellen Terry says, "I have never known anyone with so much natural gift for the stage. Unconsciously he did everything right—I mean all the technical things, over which some of us have to labour for years. The first part he played at the Lyceum, Arthur

St. Valery, was good, and he went on steadily improving. The last part he played at the Lyceum, Edward IV, in *Richard III*, was, maternal prejudice quite apart, a most remarkable performance."

Recalling the performance of his childhood she says, "It is because of Teddy that *Eugene Aram* is associated in my mind with one of the most beautiful sights upon the stage that I ever saw in my life. He was about ten or eleven at the time, and as he tied up the stage roses, his cheeks, untouched by rouge, put the reddest of them to shame! He was so graceful and natural; he spoke his lines with ease and smiled all over his face! 'A born actor'! I said, although Joey was my son. Whenever I think of that stage garden I could weep for pride, and for sorrow too, because before he was thirty, my son had left the stage—he who had it all in him. I have good reason to be proud of what he has done since, but I regret the lost actor *always*."

Such regret was natural and personal to Ellen Terry. The rest of the world need not regret, though it share her pride, for the actor was not really lost but continued to inform all Gordon Craig's work for the theatre. This fact was unrecognised by those who, forgetting or ignorant of his training and capacity as an actor, failed to understand that his designing and his thought were all bent on satisfying the highest requirements of the actor, and through him, of the drama.

You are all welcome to-day
I hope - I've been -
I've been speaking
last night & looking just
in the middle in the
the first in reply

Henry III
1st night.

AUTOGRAPH NOTE FROM IRVING TO ELLEN TERRY
on Gordon Craig's performance as Cromwell in *Henry VIII*, at the Lyceum Theatre, 1892.

III

AN ODD LABOUR PARTY

THE crisis which caused Gordon Craig to retire from the stage, in 1897, and to remain absent for three years, can be divined from the opening chapters of *Woodcuts and Some Words*. He states as clearly as he can how it was that the London theatre was tyrannical to him as an artist, and why he went "on strike" and formed an actors' union consisting of only one member.

"I formed an odd Labour Party—a strange anarchist, for I was alone. A Labour Party which consists of more than one member seems to me to be a strike below the belt, the anarchy of the mob a bit idiotic. For to strike, to labour, to anarch (if there be such a job) is deuced difficult, and a difficult thing must be done alone. Quiet is essential; silence imperative. Then when you strike, labour, or dance a war dance, something electric happens. No?—Well, it happened with me—I woke up."

La vita nuova was not to be an easy one. He threw up eight pounds a week for nothing a month except what he could earn by drawing for

journals, designing book-plates and anything else he could think of to avoid taking the money which the theatre was only prepared to give him on condition that he denied everything in which he as an artist believed. The while he planned how to wake up the old theatre.

He was naturally studious. Irving had almost unnecessarily advised him to buy books. While at school he had pored over the plays of Shakespeare which he bought with his pocket-money in the threepenny volumes published in Cassell's National Library. At home his mother's bookshelves had provided him with a good foundation for dramatic study. From her association with Godwin, she had formed a great respect for the oracular voice of Ruskin. Her son at a most impressionable time came very much under the influence of the thought and style of the eminent Victorian. Ruskin's aristocratic view of art, his views on social order and on the duties of the governors to the governed were very sympathetic to his nature. Ruskin, too, had a sensibility to architecture and the visible and plastic arts to which the body of literary critics of the drama were blind. It was against such blindness that Gordon Craig was to make war. When he began to write, it was with something of the lordly manner of Ruskin, which gave readers the impression of a man quite different in nature from the gay and humorous Terry who, however, was still there behind the manner. His

work also gave the impression of being that of a man of independent, if not lordly, means such as Ruskin in fact possessed,—one who could well afford to pursue a lofty ideal from a position of cultured ease. His sincerity commands attention more when it is realised that he was often penniless, and his independent spirit was maintained chiefly on hope deferred. Tolstoi, playing the peasant, while his wife held his rich estates, was not more sworn to his task.

He began to publish a magazine, *The Page*, in 1898, at first from Kingston-upon-Thames and, in the following year, from his own home at Hackbridge, Surrey. It had a staff of one, himself. In the first year, it was issued as a shilling monthly, and only a hundred and forty copies were printed. He was his own illustrator and very often his own verse-writer and story-teller. The woodcuts, which he sometimes coloured by hand, were immediately recognised by good judges to be of rare beauty. It was said, "Here is strength that beggars the Beggarstaff Brothers, technique and composition quite Rembrandesque, and faithfulness extraordinary."

The Page announced the forthcoming publication of *A Book of Penny Toys*. The author was compelled to revise this title to *Gordon Craig's Book of Penny Toys*—which he felt to be regretably egotistical—because his first idea was adopted by another. The book contains twenty drawings of penny wooden toys, each suggesting perfectly

the material and action of the models. Every drawing is accompanied with an appropriate verse under which is a tailpiece—generally a woodcut. It appeared as though the designer would complete the conquest of the nursery which was begun by Randolph Caldecott. But even in the advertisement of the book he leads us back to the theatre and the invention of plays. "It took a great artist to dream this toy, and a great craftsman to make it. It is as intricate in plot as are the stories by Dumas (Papa)," he says of "The Oilcake Crusher". He traces the "Monkey up a Stick" back to the creative thought of its originator, making it more alive through its historical associations, in the manner which was soon to become characteristic of his reading of theatrical evidence.

During 1899, the magazine was issued quarterly, and four hundred and ten copies printed.

The exercises in designing and writing, which the artist provided for himself in this journal, were all with the purpose of qualifying for the task to which he dedicated all his powers—the raising of the status of the art of the theatre. He set no value on his draughtsmanship, on his ability as an engraver, or as a writer. He did not seek a place beside men whose whole study was in these arts. He only wished to measure his strength with those who knew how to handle a stage and to produce a play.

In his designing, he was influenced by everyone

in whom he could discover a single dramatic touch, therefore especially by Rembrandt, Blake, Callot, and Piranesi.

Some wonderfully good work was being done by the illustrators of the time. In particular, a series of drawings by Lewis Loeb showing the theatre at Orange, which appeared in *The Century Magazine*, in 1895, fired his imagination. He kept these before his eyes for years. In them he saw the dramatic value of large doors, deep shadows and small figures, which he was soon to bring forcefully before the public in his own way.

On seeing a plan of Wagner's Theatre at Bayreuth, his belief was confirmed that it is not always necessary to "do as was done last time". Changes were possible and possibly desirable.

Edwin Abbey was showing his series of pictures, the ideas of which were derived from Shakespeare's plays and from *She Stoops to Conquer*. Abbey treated the subjects in a way quite different from that which the theatre had come to accept as the only possible conception. Craig saw what a lively interest they created.

Howard Pyle, a copy of whose *Robin Hood* had been given to the young actor by Irving, continued to stir his dramatic sense with his work in *Scribner's Magazine*. Pyle was equally skilful in dramatising pirates or courtiers.

Oliver Merson, one of the designers of the French coinage, illustrated an article on a miracle

play with thin line drawings. This showed Craig the "multiple scene" of the mediæval stage—a scene with a number of settings displayed simultaneously.

The hypnotic power of Irving over the younger men who worked with him was so great that they all grew to act *à la Irving*, and to think his the only possible way. So too, it was thought that the familiar scenic method and style of costuming was the only one that ever had been or ever could be. No one appreciated better than Craig that Irving's method was right for Irving, and his time, but he saw that the life of the theatre is in change. A new way of doing an old thing is necessary—an ever fresh realisation of the dramatic spirit. With the break-up of the Lyceum company in 1902, there was need to build up something else. During its last years Bernard Shaw, ambitious for fame and fortune, developed a furious correspondence with Ellen Terry, assuring her that she was wasting her genius in Irving's theatre, and that she ought to be acting in his plays. Irving's old public was persuaded to desert him, but he proved magnificently that he could attract a new one from the younger generation, and it was only his death which left a vacancy to be filled. The "just as good" and the "much better" were alleged to be filling the principal London theatres, but no lover of the poetic drama could believe that.

IV

INNOVATIONS

"Before the theory—the practice"

THE final number of *The Page* quarterly, for 1899, contained the announcement that *The Purcell Operatic Society* had been formed with the initial purpose of reviving the works of Purcell, Arne, Handel, Gluck and other composers, and that the first production would be Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. This was to be given on three successive evenings in the Spring of 1900. It was added that, "No pains will be spared to make these performances complete in every way". The Society was to be limited to two hundred and fifty members, and the annual subscription was one guinea. The Musical Director was Martin Fallas Shaw, and the Stage Director, Edward Gordon Craig.

Two double numbers of *The Page*, running to four hundred and fifty copies, were promised for 1900. These duly appeared while "the Staff" was engaged in expressing, on an actual stage, the ideas of the theatre at which the journal had hinted.

At this time Gordon Craig had no theories of stage production, nor had he as yet any great historical knowledge of stage-craft. His art was instinctive. He read the story of the opera, and as his friend Martin Shaw played through a piano arrangement of the score, the music and the poetry evoked a spontaneous vision in the stage-artist's mind. To realise that vision in the theatre, he had to evolve a technique of his own. The accepted methods of the Lyceum and of Her Majesty's Theatre as homes of poetic drama could not give expression to the images which he saw vividly in his mind.

The performance was first given at the Hampstead Conservatoire of Music, in 1900, and it was seen again at the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill, in the following year, when *The Masque of Love* from the opera, *Dioclesian*, was added to the programme.

Ellen Terry had first consulted Bernard Shaw as to the advisability of transferring the production from the Conservatoire to a public theatre. She believed in its power of attraction, and naturally wished to provide an opportunity for her son's work to be widely recognised. Mr. Shaw had not seen Gordon Craig's creation, and his advice was that the interest of Purcell's opera was musical and not theatrical, that therefore its appeal could be only to the music-loving public, and that Ellen Terry, in contemplating the venture of any money

on it, would be wise to calculate on the conditions of concert and not of theatre-management. He gave no encouragement to the idea of taking Purcell as a basis from which to create a work of theatrical art. This is the more curious because Bernard Shaw was an avowed student of Nietzsche, from which philosopher he might have gained a true perception of the relationship of visual art to that of music. *The Birth of Tragedy* shows that Nietzsche would have recognised at once the right and the necessity for Gordon Craig, the artist-dramatist, to create his drama from "the Spirit of Music". With Wagner, Nietzsche saw also that the scene and the play are conceived fundamentally together and as a vision.

Instead of recognising this, Mr. Shaw gave his support to a little group which, at the time, was making a great clamour against the "pictorial" stage and for a "return" to what were represented, on mistaken authority, as being the conditions of the Elizabethan stage: four bare boards, some labels, and a passion. He expressed regret that Gordon Craig had "taken his hereditary genius for acting behind the scenes" and, without any pretence at modesty, remarked that he would otherwise have been "very useful to me as an actor". Mr. Shaw failed to see that the younger man had left a smaller field for a greater one.

That Mr. Shaw was unable to perceive whither led the path on which the stage director was

instinctively setting out at this time, explains much of the subsequent higher theatrical history of England, Europe and America. There was division where there might have been a great collaboration.

Of those who saw Gordon Craig's first productions, many were artists of highly trained sensibility. Some of them recorded that they felt as though a new planet had swum into their ken. It is now clear that in the history of *mise-en-scène* there was a new advent.

The Society with its modest means had made bold to take the Coronet Theatre for a week. In case the public should not be ready to support the experiment, Ellen Terry and her company followed the performances of the operas with an excerpt from her repertory, *Nance Oldfield*.

The Balance Sheet showed the expenses to amount to £531 16s. 8d. and the share of the receipts from the week's performances to be £533 6s. 4d. (with a balance of £1 os. 1d. from the funds of the previous season, and of £2 10s. 1d. from those of the current year). The cost of the scenery was £98 19s. 9d. and of dresses £76 13s. 4d.,—very modest figures, and a poor foundation for the excuse made later that Gordon Craig was too extravagant for any theatrical exchequer.

The next production was Handel's opera *Acis and Galatea* and a repetition of *The Masque of Love*. These were given for one week at Great Queen Street Theatre, starting March 10, 1902. A

souvenir programme, now prized by collectors, indicates the individual character of the performances. Another experiment of the same year was the production by Gordon Craig of Laurence Housman's miracle play, *Bethlehem*. This was given in the hall of the Imperial Institute, South Kensington, London.

In 1903, Craig essayed to collaborate with the accepted methods of production by designing two scenes for a play called *Sword and Song* for which his uncle, Fred Terry, was responsible, at the Shaftesbury Theatre. One was a wood-scene, and he engraved a block from the design. Its influence has been seen in other wood-scenes since.

From the time he gave up acting, and all through these years of experiment, Gordon Craig's mind had been in a state of ferment. What he felt most was the absence of guiding principles in theatric expression. Music, painting, drawing, letters, architecture and sculpture have standards and are judged by them. He recalled that on the night of his first appearance at the Lyceum Theatre, there had been present Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, and William Rothenstein—representatives of the arts of illustration, of literature and of painting. These men he reflected had found *standards* in the art to which they chose to devote their lives. He was sometimes tempted to regret that he was giving his to a theatre which denied the need of reference to first principles.

The prejudice against study and "rules" and a complacency in the "all-right-on-the-night" instinct, which in general characterises those concerned with theatrical activity, seems to be due in part to a misapprehension as to the nature and purpose of rules as they are understood in the arts. What is a rule? The word has more than one meaning. It may mean a *measure*, or it may mean a *prescription*. When we say that "acting cannot be taught" we mean, or should mean, that no rules, in the sense of a recipe or prescription, can be given which will turn a stick into an actor. But rules, if they have not yet been defined, are surely somewhere to be sought and found whereby to measure the relative value of dramatic expression. Only by the establishment of standards, of measures, of rules in this sense, can the expression of the theatre approximate to the condition of the fine arts. It was because it was feared that Gordon Craig was attempting to impose his own prescription on the whole theatre that superficial criticism agitated itself to repel him. If it had been understood that he was aiming to define an ideal towards which those who chose to follow might well advance, there would have been less obstruction put in his way.

Having felt himself to be adrift since his first plunge into theatrical life, Craig was determined to get some distance towards the discovery of the laws of the art of the theatre.

The training of the old theatrical companies was largely a training by copying. The children of the theatre absorbed the traditional technique through their eyes and ears and felt no need to become selfconscious artists as a Leonardo or a Flaubert understood selfconscious art. But Gordon Craig longed to give to the expression of the theatre the durable character of the arts which live on when the artist himself dies. He marked Leonardo's words, "Shun those studies in which the results of the work die with the worker".

When one theatrical tradition breaks up with the change of the changing years, the actors become helpless. The old visible and audible model on which they so entirely relied having been taken from them, how are they to rebuild with no standard saved from the past?

Craig began to turn to the past, hoping to find that there was a standard to be rescued.

V

WANTED—A SCHOOL FOR THE ART OF THE THEATRE

IN 1903, after his experience of working in a London theatre, under existing conditions, Gordon Craig came to the conclusion that this was not the proper place for experiment. He asked for the foundation of a School for the Art of the Theatre. He envisaged a place where knowledge could first be assembled, then studied and arranged; a place in which learners should first instruct themselves before attempting to teach others a subject so entirely lacking in definition; a place in which principles should be sought until found; a place in which finally drama should be originated that could be referred to the highest standards discoverable. Such a school, he believed, could feed the commercial theatre with tested productions and ideas. He had faith in his own instinctive powers to discover the right method for the conduct of such an innovation in educational establishments. He hoped that it would be recognised to be a good national investment, and that some man who could well afford to do so would treat it as such. If there had been less fear of change and a

greater demonstration of unanimity amongst the men who were giving their lives to the theatre, no doubt such a patron would have been given the necessary confidence. Granville Barker, Henry Ainley and Gordon Craig might have formed an irresistible triumvirate at this moment if some wise counsellor had reconciled their differences of outlook and had harnessed them together.¹

Gordon Craig issued a formal prospectus for his school, a copy of which, by the forethought of J. M. Bulloch, has been preserved in the British Museum. On this copy are notes in Craig's handwriting which show his enthusiasm, "We shall work the art out from the commencement, accepting no tradition of any kind if it is devoid of common-sense. Inventing nothing unless it has common and uncommon sense. . . . I like what Bernard Shaw writes about the operatic stage tradition, 'The law of traditional performance is "Do as was done last time"'. The law of all living and fruitful performance is "Obey the innermost impulse which the music gives and obey it to the most exhaustive satisfaction." And as that impulse is never, in a fertile and artistic nature, the impulse to do what was done last time, the two laws are incompatible, being virtually laws respectively of death and life in art.' It's the same with plays, anything."

¹ Granville Barker became the advocate of a School, many years later, in his book, *The Exemplary Theatre*, 1922.

Response to the idea of the school was not immediately forthcoming. Gordon Craig's friends begged him to produce one more play to demonstrate his qualification for its direction and his claim to support. His dazzling and elusive personality made people doubtful as to the seriousness of his intention. They could not fit him into the rôle of a conventional schoolmaster. There was no need for worry on that score, an unconventional master was what he proposed to be.

He began the collection of a library of books and prints concerning the history of the theatre, the existence of which was unknown to the dramatic criticism of the nineteenth century. The collection was to find a fitting home in the school when it materialised, and ideas from it contributed to the plan of study.

In 1902, he had first studied the second book of Serlio's *Architectura*. This part of Serlio's work, which was published in 1545, deals with theatre construction and dramatic spectacle. Its authority was accepted on the continent and in England, and the later sixteenth century theatre developed largely from the theory defined in it.

The unquestioning acceptance of the inherent relationship between drama and spectacle shown by the founders of the Renaissance stage had been lost sight of when, after a lapse of centuries, a reconstruction of the Elizabethan theatre was attempted. So that at the time when Gordon

Craig began his experiments these verses of Austin Dobson represented the opinion which had come to be accepted as true to historical fact and to aesthetic principle:

When Burbage played the stage was bare
Of fount and temple, tower and stair;
Two back-swords eked a battle out;
Two supers made a rabble rout;
The throne of Denmark was a chair!

And yet, no less, the audience there
Thrilled through all changes of Despair,
Hope, Anger, Fear, Delight, and Doubt,
When Burbage played!

This is the Actor's gift; to share
All moods, all passions, nor to care
One whit for scene, so he without
Can lead men's minds the roundabout,
Stirred as of old those hearers were
When Burbage played!

This was the settled view which Craig's work had to encounter. William Poel had, in 1881, produced *Hamlet*, without scenery, at St. George's Hall and, in 1895, he had founded *The Elizabethan Stage Society* which was instrumental in spreading the "placard myth".

Mr. Bernard Shaw showed what fun he could extract from the assumptions of this Society by writing *The Admirable Bashville* for performance "in the Elizabethan manner", with placards to indicate the scene and the changes of scene. For this he was credited with showing "a profound

knowledge of the working conditions of the Elizabethan stage". It was, however, no profundity but a shallow ignorance both in its historical and its æsthetic aspect. These ideas of the stage were "interpretation and not text".

It was a delusion of Dryden that Shakespeare "found not, but created first a stage", a delusion which through him imposed itself on eighteenth century criticism and was inherited by critics of the nineteenth century.

In the *Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage*, published by Edmund Malone in his edition of Shakespeare, in 1790, the commentator wrote, "It seems to me probable that in the early part at least of our author's acquaintance with the theatre, the want of scenery seems to have been supplied by the simple expedient of writing the names of the different places where the scene was to be laid in the progress of the play, which were disposed in such a manner as to be visible to the audience." This was repeated in nine subsequent editions and was quoted in *The Percy Anecdotes*.

Though the critic, George Steevens, had immediately contested Malone's view, the "seeming probability" was quickly converted by others into a statement of fact covering the whole pre-Restoration stage.

In 1844, J. R. Planché gave a series of experimental performances of *The Taming of the Shrew*

at the Theatre Royal, the Haymarket, in what was supposed to be the Elizabethan manner, with a draped stage and placards which were changed in the course of the play by one of the actors. This no doubt helped to establish the curious notion in spite of its patent absurdity. No one felt called upon to reconcile this reading of theatrical history with the fact that the puritans had from the beginning raised their voices in protest against the spectacular enticement of the Elizabethan stage.

A more thorough study of the manner of the use of inscriptions than Malone was able to give shows that signs of decorative kind were occasionally used, *in conjunction with scenes*, in the elaborate productions of Tudor times, to fulfil the primary function of a programme in announcing the title of a play and sometimes the name of the author. These signs were garnished with gold and silver, and were encircled with garlands or otherwise beautified; they might be supported by cupid, by angel, or by devil as the artist fancied. A temple, a house, or an inn might have an inscription over the door, in imitation of an actual building of such a character; a sign-post might mimic an actual sign-post. There was no theory that the scene should be "left to the imagination" and painted only with words. The shows that delighted Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Queen Elizabeth were not designed for puritans. England was sharing in

a wave of enthusiasm for the staging of plays which swept over western Europe from Italy where the scenic production was taken as seriously as the aural production.

In upholding the fundamentally visual nature of theatric art Gordon Craig and his master, Henry Irving, were in line with the artists of the theatre of renaissance Italy and of ancient Greece. Their work might justly be adversely criticised if its manner was at fault but not on the ground of its being in principle "pictorial". Necessarily Craig's thought and practice separated him from that of men who argued that scenes, costumes, and properties were merely "adventitious aids" to the spoken word.

The drama of the Attic theatre, the most powerful known to history, was an amalgam of two parts, one primarily visual and one aural, which were separate in origin and in development—the Dionysian dance and lyric song and the Apollonian rhapsodical recitation. When, in the course of time, the rationalist poets upset the balance of the two by claiming dominance for the spoken part, they disunited instead of uniting the people. To these facts of history Gordon Craig alluded when he said that he believed the first development of the theatre to have been more complete than the last. He wanted it to learn once more to be self-reliant. He wished to bring back all the arts which were focussed in the early theatre before

the writer became over-powerful and usurped all else:

The theatre was for the people, and always for the people. The poets would make the theatre for the select dilettanti. They would put difficult psychological thoughts before the public expressed in difficult words, and would make for this public something which it was impossible for them to understand, and unnecessary for them to know; whereas the theatre must show them sights, show them life, show them beauty, and not speak in difficult sentences. And the reason why the theatre is being kept back to-day is because the poet is pulling one way, saying they should only be given words; and the people are pulling the other way, saying they desire to see sights, realistically or poetically shown, not turned into literature. So far, most of the brainy people are on the side of the poets; they have got the upper hand.

Thoughts such as these were directing him as he planned his school. They meant a revolution with no one any the worse and possibly a new lease of life for the poetic drama which appeared to be in need of exercise.

VI

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE, EXPERIMENTS

IN April, 1903, Ellen Terry took the Imperial Theatre, London, for a short season, of which she says, "I hope it will be remembered, when I am spoken of after my death as a 'Victorian' actress of the 'old school', that I produced a spectacular play of Ibsen's in a manner which possibly anticipated the scenic ideas of the future by a century, of which at any rate the orthodox theatre managers of the present age would not have dreamed."

This production was *The Vikings* and her son, Gordon Craig, was her collaborator.

It is a common experience of London theatrical management that a play and a production which is worth seeing may not find a steady attendance until the fourth or fifth week of a run. The best advertisement that a performance can have is the personal recommendation of those who have seen it. But it takes time for this to be passed round.

Ellen Terry's finances were too slight to allow of the performances of *The Vikings* continuing for

more than one week as the attendances were not immediately large. The theatre was an out-of-the-way one, and advertising the event was difficult. If there had been a stronger monetary support to guarantee another week, it might well have grown into a popular success which would have made Gordon Craig's path less difficult than it has proved to be.

The Vikings was followed by a production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, which treated the comedy throughout on a plane of poetry.

The Press for all these early productions was very favourable. It could hardly have been more so. No quarrel was found with the Practice. Its original beauty was welcomed. Artists, including Max Beerbohm, William Rothenstein, Arthur Symons, W. B. Yeats and Graham Robertson brought their critical judgement to bear on them, and admitted that they were a revelation of powers of expression on the stage which they had not dreamed possible. The hope was expressed that during the coming season at least one opera might be staged and mounted at Covent Garden "by the same daring and able hand".

Count Harry Kessler was another witness of the performances, and he was soon influential in making Gordon Craig's name honoured abroad.

It was only when the short season at the Imperial Theatre proved to be a small financial loss, that a carping criticism began to be heard from people

who had not been present. They knew that the performances were different from the accepted run and therefore decided that they were "precious" or "freakish" or any other term likely to prejudice the fortunes of their creator in the English theatre. The "legend" of Craig began to grow. He was "unpractical" (though Ellen Terry declared that she did not find him so when working with him); he was "impossible", "extravagant", "mad" (though no doubt when the wind was southerly he could tell a hawk from a hernshaw); he was feared as a "rebel".

Finding the world of actors, managers, and critics only prepared to misunderstand him, the Hamlet dæmon in him made him help to create the legendary Craig. Of malice he had none, but he was now wide awake to many things to which others were still asleep. They did not wish to be disturbed. Things were all right as they were. He started giving pinpricks to dullness as he encountered it blocking the way to the advancement of the theatre, then he developed "a sting a wasp might envy". This was seen particularly in the notes in catalogues of the exhibitions which he held. The point of the sting was not felt by those at whom it was directed, but there was a sense of exasperation at the incomprehensibility of the man. They did not know what he was talking about, or writing about, or doing. The gay wit and humour that were there escaped them—together with the

seriousness of the purpose. And so the "legend" grew over the years.

Gordon Craig himself has at moments said, "It's my own fault if I haven't a theatre", but at the next moment he must have realised that if he hadn't given a necessary jolt to the complacency of mistaken opinion he would not have achieved the far-flung revolution in thought which has actually followed.

Being so much a creature of instinct, he was quite, quite sure that he was right when the world told him that he was wrong. This made him distrust sophisticated criticism. He knew that the most valuable thing in his own art was its spontaneous spring—about which there could be no argument—and he had a horror of dead formalism. Living form he generally captured, but in his writing he was always ready to "sacrifice some correctness to any G.C.-ism as it's better although bad". His pen was not always as clear as his brain. But much that appeared puzzling, when regarded from the standpoint of nineteenth century criticism, is seen to be clear and consistent when the fallacies of that criticism are left behind. Craig's argument is consistent with a point of view the reverse of what he found prevailing. He, by his instinct, and a small group of research workers, by historical evidence, have turned the tide on three centuries of mistaken opinion on the fundamental principles of dramatic art.

In 1904, Herbert Beerbohm Tree started an Academy of Dramatic Art in London, but it was not the experimental school for which Gordon Craig had been asking. It served rather as an agency for things as they were.

As England offered him no prospect of finding exercise for powers which could not be denied, he was compelled to look abroad. He wanted to learn what might be happening in the theatres of other lands and he heard that in Germany he would find at least enthusiasm and energy, if no very great art. So to this country he went. He first visited Weimar, on the invitation of Count Kessler, of whose encouragement and understanding he is never forgetful. Of this time he records that "nowhere was there more promise in all Germany than in Weimar in 1904, when Count Kessler lent himself to the task of guiding the taste of the people who were eager to follow him". Besides a mind packed with ideas, Gordon Craig carried, with his luggage, many sheaves of designs for the theatre. His friend and patron brought his work before the notice of the chief managers of Germany, and interpreted it by his experience in having seen the London productions. He induced Dr. Otto Brahm, the manager of the Lessing Theatre, Berlin, to offer this theatre to Gordon Craig for a production of a free adaptation of Otway's play, *Venice Preserved*, which had been made by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. And so the

“New Movement”, as it was called—the movement “Towards a New Theatre”—was launched on the continent of Europe.

No freakish notions of newness were in the artist’s mind—“*A New Theatre*, in the sense in which I use the term, means a fresher, more lively theatre . . . like a New Year. There is no new time; it’s the same old time; but the effort to understand can be new. It is this new effort which the world seems to make as each New Year comes round.”



PART TWO
WORK ABROAD



VII

IN GERMANY

"After the practice—the theory"

OTTO BRAHM had been a journalist, a literary critic, and had studied little of the theatre except the written drama when he took up the work of directing the Lessing Theatre. He was successful in producing the plays of Ibsen and of Gerhardt Hauptmann. Craig, in working with him in the production of *Venice Preserved*, found himself struggling with the literary tradition, the conviction that the words were the "spiritual" part of the drama, and the visible realisation the "material" part. Brahm was not prepared to understand Craig's insistence that words are physical signs no less than any others and that visible signs may have a spiritual significance and may be used with as great a play of fancy as language. When he prosaically asked of one scene which Craig designed, "Where is the door?" he received the reply, "There is no door. There is a way in and out." But he could not see that this was more to the dramatic purpose than an unmistakable door with a handle and all complete. He was only reconciled

when assured that the scene had been copied line by line from an old Italian manuscript. With this experience, Craig found that his ideas could not grow in that theatre. Again he was out of work.

He began to wood-engage once more, doing four designs for the publication of Hofmannsthal's play, *The White Fan*. At the same time he wrote his first important essay, in the form of a dialogue. This was published in a small volume, entitled *The Art of the Theatre*, in 1905. Mr. Graham Robertson, in a preface, recalled the delight with which he had, a few years earlier, witnessed the practice of which the book expounded the theory. A German edition, *Das Kunst Des Theaters*, with a preface by Count Kessler, appeared in the same year.

The first theatre manager to see that the dreams and the principles outlined by Craig, and illustrated by his designs, could very profitably be put into immediate practice was Max Reinhardt.

Reinhardt, had been first an amateur actor in his native town of Baden. He had afterwards, in 1894, joined the professional company of the Municipal Theatre of Salzburg, from which he was engaged by Otto Brahm for the company of the Lessing Theatre. In 1902, he had started management on his own account at the Kleines Theater, from which, in 1903, he had passed to the Neues Theater, and at the time Gordon Craig's book appeared he was opening the Deutsches Theater. The type of production to which he had



A SNAPSHOT OF GORDON CRAIG, IN BERLIN, 1905
Taken by Isadora Duncan.

hitherto put his name now underwent a startling metamorphosis. Otto Brahm saw his public being lured away by the new methods.

Reinhardt had, at his side, what Gordon Craig lacked—a business man who knew how to act his complementary part in getting things done. This was his brother, Edmund Reinhardt, of whom the world heard nothing, but without whom Max Reinhardt would not have obtained the reputation, as he shortly afterwards did, for “living what Craig only dreams”. The firm of Reinhardt showed admirable enterprise. The pity was that no one in England showed the confidence which would have assured Craig a steady patronage at home. There were rich men who would have financed his projects as Reinhardt’s were financed, until they showed a return, if opinion had been organised in support of his proposals. But it seemed that he had been the candid friend of the English theatre to the extent of killing the kindness and the theatre managers whose opinion impressed popular journalism and the public were not ready to endorse his ideas in a way whereby he should benefit. The instinct of conservatism in the theatre is to keep to a level which can easily be maintained rather than attempt heights which can only be sustained by imaginative and courageous effort. The vested interests of the theatre were against what was feared to be his “disturbing” influence.

If a stage director is to get the best out of a company of actors there must be confidence and devotion. Max Reinhardt won such confidence and popularity by leaving his brother to deal with disagreeable matters. The way in which this was done became an entertainment to those who could see both sides. An actor would ask brother Max to promise him this and that advancement in the parts he was to play or the salary he was to receive, and the suave Max would promise anything and everything, saying, Yes, yes, certainly, certainly. But when the elated actor went to brother Edmund for confirmation of the promises, he was met with pursed lips and, That cannot be. Max promised? Max knows nothing about that—a saying which became a joke in the German theatre. So Max and Edmund successfully played the traditional comedy of their Jewish race. Edmund Reinhardt took upon himself the unpopular rôle that his brother's path should be made smooth. As a business combination they were remarkably successful and became a national pride.

Gordon Craig's call for the realisation of drama through "Colour, Line, and Movement" or through "Action, Scene and Voice" and other arrangements of an expressive trinity was ridiculed in England as being æstheticism of the greenery-yallery-Grosvenor-Gallery School. That was not so on the continent, partly because there the book naturally fell only into the hands of artists and

students, while at home it was at the mercy of the general reader who in many cases was not qualified to pass the judgement which nevertheless was passed and the theories misinterpreted from the standpoint of the popular misconception that drama is included by dramatic literature.

No one could have stated more clearly, than did the clear-sighted author that the play is the *idea*, the rest the realisation of the idea. "Does anyone think that I hold the scenes, costumes, lights, programmes or actors, of more importance than the play?" he asks in the introduction. (This is in 1905, we may remember.) He showed that he made no such mistake. But he insisted, quite logically, that the idea is not primarily or even necessarily expressed in words and that words, when a dramatic artist uses them, derive their significance from the environment in which they are spoken as well as from the figure who speaks. It is strange that so many dramatic critics seem to be constitutionally incapable of understanding this argument and still to this day represent Craig as proposing to substitute the scene for the play. They still try to persuade the English public that "Mr. Craig, by applying his genius solely to the visual side of dramatic art, has made the part appear both to himself and to those who are hypnotised by his splendour, greater than the whole." (*Times Lit. Sup.*, Aug. 16, 1928.) It is not Craig, but the writers, who take the

part (the verbal part) to be greater than the whole.

The need is for such critics to be brought to see that the division is not into "sides", one visual and one verbal, which has precedence; but it is into the two processes of *conception* and *execution*. A play is conceived in images, or ideas, to which language follows; it is executed in visible forms from which language may proceed. The force of the words will attain a higher power when the visual forms from which they come do not contradict and belie them as in too many theatres they are allowed to do. That is one of the reasons for Gordon Craig's insistence on this order of precedence. In that he proves himself a truer lover of language than his opponents.

In 1905, the Reinhardts entered into negotiations with Craig for the production of several plays including *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. But the courage of the members of the management was not equal to that of the innovator, and they wished to make modifications which would have missed the point at which the designer aimed. Mr. Shaw who was delighted that "Ellen Terry's son" should "decorate" his play was nonplussed when he found that a "decorator" was not what Craig set out to be. Altogether Gordon Craig, finding himself in unconvinced or only half-convinced company, decided that the invitation was too like the famous

one of “‘Will you walk into my parlour?’ said the Spider to the Fly”. He knew that he would not be in real command. His eyes had never ceased to be on London, and he was always hoping for a call from home. Only with a company which understood his language and could follow the *shades* of his directions would he be able to get results to justify him in the high claims which he had made on behalf of the Art of the Theatre. He still asked first for a School.

VIII

ISADORA DUNCAN AND ELEONORA DUSE

DURING this year, 1905, Gordon Craig first saw a performance by Isadora Duncan and recognised in her art a corroboration of much of his theatrical belief, a belief in the power of the direct expression of imagination through visible forms. He was the author and designer of a portfolio, published in Leipzig in 1906, *Isadora Duncan, Six Movement Designs*, with this introduction in Whitmanesque form:

Much Noise and a deep Unrest
Sadness and Dischord

Is this in any way the final estimate of the whole?
The Reality?

Is it then so certain that Life is made up
of four Absurdities?

Is it not far more certain that Life is made up of
Four Beauties:
of Calmness, Joy, Harmony,
Rhythm—the truest Reality?

And what of the expression of all this — Art?
Must Pandemonium and Ugliness
ever stand for Strength?

Must Restlessness be made the Symbol of Life?
Must a noisy and dischordant Sadness spread
itself over the Loveliness of all?

If these are questions, I am not one of the Questioners.

I have no doubt whatever.

I see Calmness and Beauty, both the Strong and the Sweet
advancing now with perfect ease.

All makes way for this spirit;

Nothing can hinder it.

Three marks of a pencil, or three hundred,

It is ever the same Picture.

A note sounded or a fall of notes,

It is the same Song.

A step or a hundred steps

It is the same Dance.

Something put down,

A Record.

Something uttered on that divine theme understood

so easily, and only with ease,

that theme which commences

" I AM HAPPY "

and which ends in

" it is Beautiful."

This is the theme she dances.

Not yet has she depicted a Gloom or a Sorrow unbearable.

Forever it seems Sunlight with her.

The little shadows themselves are found out

and move away as she passes.

This is the great power.

She comes of the lovely family,

The great Companions,

That conquering Race which has held up the world

So that it might spin without difficulty.

The courageous Giants,

The Preservers of Beauty,

The Answerers of all Riddles.

Isadora Duncan is the unnamed dancer of whom
he wrote again years later, in *The Theatre Advancing*:

You play no little dramas with others. You are
alone—you enter and fill the stage with any figure

you choose—and as many as you choose . . . your imagination peoples the place; just as in his lovely scenes the great Appia seems to pack his empty platforms with a hundred, hundred, angels—and to start them singing when he chooses. This is the power of Imagination—you both possess it—yet you choose to trifle—you who have no need to.¹

Your great power (the power not yours but which yields to you) enables you to move your hand and we seem to see lilies or roses or lilac growing. . . . You turn towards the right and by the force of your imagination you project for us a group of three who seem to advance towards you: you turn from us a little and the dark comes on; you turn a little more, evening; a little more and it is night.

It is the power of Imagination, not your power, and you possess some of it—enough to convince a world and baffle a nation.

I have seen you bring palm to palm silently and heard the cymbals—cymbals which sang rather than clashed. I have seen your shoulders move bending and heard the thunders of an old story rolling up around you. You have lain your hand on the earth obediently obeying the old Fate, and I have seen the earth open as a smile spreads and drench you in yellow light. You were more than three hundred years old as you bent to obey and you rose up a young woman.

You who alone have the secret of this magic will never tinker with the twopenny tricks of the trade.

When Gordon Craig first met her, Isadora Duncan had just founded her school “for the

¹ This in objection to the coloured lights which were irrelevantly played upon her.

regeneration of the art of the dance", at Grünewald. Her argument with him was, "Your work is the setting, but first is the living being, for the soul radiates everything. First my school, the radiant human being moving in perfect beauty; then your work, the perfect setting for this being."

But Gordon Craig's idea was more profound than this. He saw the world of the theatre as a world parallel to the natural world—the world being created before man, the scene before the actor whose acting is conditioned by it. The dramatist does not begin by conceiving characters in a void but characters in certain circumstances.

Isadora Duncan made the mistake which many have since made, of supposing that scene-designing was the whole of Craig's work.

On the advice of Count Kessler, Eleonora Duse asked Gordon Craig to design the scenes and costumes for a production of Hofmannsthal's *Electra*, in 1905, but the actress did not produce the play. A year later, she met Gordon Craig in Berlin, and invited him to Florence to create the scene for her performance of *Rosmersholm*.

He wrote this note which was printed on the programme of December, 1906. It shows clearly his intention to lift the stage on to a plane above the mundane. Others might label Ibsen a realist; Craig saw that his characters, for all their colloquial vocabulary, yet move in a world of Imagination:

Ibsen's marked detestation for Realism is nowhere more apparent than in the two plays *Rosmersholm* and *Ghosts*.

The words are the words of actuality but the drift of the words, something beyond this. There is the powerful impression of unseen forces closing upon the place: we hear continually the long-drawn out note of the horn of death.

This is heard at the commencement; it mingles with the cries towards the end.

Here and there hurries the figure of Life, not merely a little photographic figure of Rebecca West—not even a woman—but the very figure of Life itself—and all the while we hear the soft crescendo of the Death Horn as its player approaches. Therefore those who prepare to serve Ibsen, to help in the setting forth of his play, must come to the work in no photographic mood; all must approach as artists.

Realism has long ago proclaimed itself as a contemptible means of hinting at things of life and death, the two subjects of the masters. Realism is only Exposure where Art is Revelation; and therefore in the mounting of this play I have tried to avoid all Realism.

We are not in a house of the nineteenth or twentieth century built by Architect this or Master Builder that, and filled with furniture of Scandinavian design—that is not the state of mind Ibsen demands we shall be in. Let us leave period and accuracy of detail to the museums and to curiosity shops.

Let our common sense be left in the cloak room with our umbrellas and hats. We need here our finer senses only, the living part of us. We are in *Rosmersholm*, a house of shadows.

Then consider the unimportance of custom and

clothes—remember only the colour which flows through the veins of life—red or grey as the sun or moon will it, dark or fair as we will.

So look upon what is before you, with your eyes—and not through pinholes, not opera glasses, for then you will see nothing.

Then you will not see the stately and inspiring figure which passes before you; you will not feel the fire of the life-giving strength which stands in front of you; you will not be in the least aware of what the whole thing exists for. But cease to be curious—throw away all concern, enter into the observance of this as though you were at some ancient ceremony, and perhaps then you will be aware of the value of the spirit which moves before you as Rebecca West.

Do you think you see a sad and gloomy picture before you? Look again. You will find an amazingly joyous vision.

You will see Life as represented by Rebecca West, the will to do free until the end.

That in itself is inspiration without limit.

You will see fools surrounding this figure of Life, fools who are either cowards or knaves—that is to say maimed examples of living beings; but not alive creatures. You will hear these fools, knaves, and cowards talking, hoping to entrap Life, to bind it, to control it—and you will see Life triumphant and folly destroyed.

I do not know where except in Ibsen we can to-day find such faithfulness to the old creed—or such an advocate for the individuality of the Flame.

Ibsen can be so acted and so staged as to be made insignificant and mean. Therefore we must remember our artistry and forget our propensity towards photography—we must for this new poet re-form a new theatre.

And this is the easiest thing in the world—for the reasons are manifold and the will to remould is indestructible.

It is therefore possible now to announce that the birth of the new Theatre and the new Art has begun.

Isadora Duncan has left a highly coloured account of the preparations and of the performance, in which she describes the delighted Duse as saying over and over again, "Only through Gordon Craig will we poor actors find release from this monstrosity, this charnel house, which is the theatre of to-day." Gordon Craig has written a deliberate account in which he records that he worked for the Queen of the European Theatre at a time when she had no courtiers and no court, and no one was willing to raise a finger to further her ideals. "It was most exhilarating", he says, his courage ever rising with difficulties. (*The Dial*, May, 1928; *Life and Letters*, Sept., 1928.) Duse was quite unable, with all her great reputation, to secure the conditions which her own best work and his required. They were not extravagant conditions but conditions of good sense.

When Duse intended to act the play in Nice, Craig's scene proved to be too big for the stage of the theatre, and the stage-manager ruthlessly cut it down, completely destroying the proportions in which its magic largely resided. Gordon Craig sent a letter of protest to the actress at her hotel,

to which she responded with the brief note, "What they have done to your scene, they have been doing for years to my art."

From Holland, where he held an exhibition this same year, he addressed a letter to the *Saturday Review* in which he besought London actors and managers to make a stand, before it was too late, against the commercialisation and the trustification of the English theatre which was beginning, and was threatening to drag it down from the position to which Irving had lately raised it. He emphasised that the art of the theatre is differentiated from all other arts in being expression through the movement of things. The signature "Gordon Craig" meant very little in London in those days and actors, had they read the letter, would not have believed in the prophecy of the death of the theatre as they knew it and in the birth of a new in which they were besought to assist:

The theatre of the future will be a theatre of visions, not a theatre of sermons nor a theatre of epigrams. A new power has been discovered and will develop itself (indeed until its strength surpasses all your dreams) and so long as the world searches for rest and refreshment these two things will be found in the theatre of the future. So, come, let the voices say what the brains think and the hearts feel; no longer continue to hide but assist us to rebuild; and while we are about it let us measure for an art which shall exceed in stature all other arts; which shall go further than

any other art; an art which says less yet shows more than all; an art which is simple for all to understand it feelingly; an art which springs from movement, movement which is the very symbol of life.

There are many who argue that "Art is international", and who wonder that an artist working abroad and building an international reputation, like Gordon Craig, should yet believe passionately in England for the English and in each land being responsible for its own. Though critics hail Craig's work as transcending boundaries of time and place, and as being "international", the artist himself insists on his English birth and training. He would say that there has been no great art but what is deeply rooted in a native soil which gives national characteristics to that art. So while ready to appreciate the art of all nations, which is internationalism in a sense, Gordon Craig's concern has ever been first for the English contribution to that internationalism.

IX

A THOUSAND SCENES IN ONE SCENE

AT the beginning of the present century, it dawned upon a few minds that there is an intimate connection between the scene and the play that is performed in it. This idea did not occur to the average playgoer who was content to accept the scenic convention of the moment and was generally impatient of the discussion of any other possibility. An occasional round of applause would be given to an "effect", but for the most part scenery was looked on as a passive background, a pictorial illustration, to the play.

Then Mr. W. J. Lawrence began to make an enquiry into the physical conditions and scenic conventions of the Elizabethan playhouse. His writings on this subject inspired and directed a number of students at home and abroad to examine the relationship between the structure of the theatre and the structure of the plays performed in it. Mr. Lawrence described The Theatre, the first permanent English playhouse, as being without prototype. Later enquirers, taking a longer view, discovered that, far from this being the case, the

first English playhouse was built on a theory of theatre construction derived from Italy where the study was part of the classical revival.

When in the nineteenth century, certain scene painters had been received into the ranks of Royal Academicians, there was a shocked protest from men who were quite unaware of the long and aristocratic history of scenic art and of the part which had been played by Raphael, as theatre architect and scenic artist, in leading to the sixteenth century theatre and its scenic conventions.

Theatres have sometimes employed one architectural scene, modified by changeable symbols (the ancient method), sometimes a *multiple scene*, that is, a required number of settings shown simultaneously, has been used (a mediæval method). Towards the end of the sixteenth century, scenic artists became possessed by a passion to *change the scene*. At first the scenic changes were made in sheer enthusiasm, for their own sake, without any regard to the changes of place in the drama enacted within the scenes. The attempt to accommodate one to the other was late in development.

In spite of the criticism which would impose a theory of "four boards and a passion" on dramatic art, in practice there has never been a stage which could remain bare for long. An historical survey shows the inevitability of *some* form of scenic art.

The modifications of theatre structure and of stage scene from the ancient prototype, down the

ages, become of absorbing interest when they are seen to be the expression of dramatic ideas.

Gordon Craig first realised the inherent relationship of the scene and the play, not as a research worker (though he was to become that later), but as a dramatic artist and a practical stage director. It was because the subject had been neglected and its interest narrowed that he appeared to give undue emphasis to the part played by the scene. To some extent, also, he exaggerated purposely in order to bring the claims of the scenic architect back into consciousness. He made it a subject of general interest as formerly it was.

The broadest ground on which the essentially dramatic character of the ideal scene can be appreciated is the philosophical. It was the ancient wisdom of the writer of the Book of Genesis that the Universe is the expression of the Thought of the Creator, that each natural object corresponds with an Idea, and that the world is a dramatisation of the Mind of God: though none has heard the voice of God, He speaks through visible symbols.

If we had a theatre capable of expressing great conceptions, it would be evident that what we were beholding was the embodied thought of the dramatist in a stage world which was not an imitation of the natural world, but parallel to it. Human life is played out against a living background of Nature—Nature which is not dead, but alive

with expression. Many patrons of the cinema entertainment find the Nature film a blessed relief from the human drama, with its "love interest", as depicted. It is to be recognised that there is a great drama of Nature, as well as a petty drama of human nature. There is also a drama of man in interaction with Nature.

Gordon Craig's dream is of a LIVING THEATRE—a theatre alive with expression in all its parts, with a range of expression not less than that of the natural world: expression seen through the mind of the dramatic artist.

The *first step* towards making "the whole thing live", he sees to be the creation (in place of the old dead scenery, lacking movement) of a Scene with a life and expression of its own, as Nature has—a durable Scene. He imagines this Scene correlated with the expression of the actor and extending the range of that expression beyond anything previously known to the stage. It is his gift to the creative actor. He distinguishes between "scenery" and "Scene" which he holds to be superior. His first lesson to scenographers is found in this comment:

If scenery must be used when performing plays, it is better to employ a simple background rather than an elaborate one, and to create this you do better to employ a few lines than many broken ones. Thus the simplest background is the unclouded sky and a plain wall is almost as simple.



S T A G E S C E N E R Y

If scenery must be used when performing plays it is better to employ a simple background rather than an elaborate one, and to create this you do better to employ a few lines than many broken ones. Thus the simplest background is the unclouded sky and a plain wall is almost as simple. ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

♣ For a perfect drama, should it be possible some day to write one, the sky must be used as the only worthy background. The manager or producer reveals his estimate of the value of Shakespeare by the elaboration or simplicity of his background. ♣ ♣ ♣

♣ The above design, (a wood engraving of the 16th century), is an example of a simple background. The lines are but little broken. In no way do they frustrate the dramatic intention. ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

♣ Scenery has to speak as well as the actors, but it is better when it says only that which is necessary. ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

♣ Here we see that we need to have it explained that it is an interior, a prison. It is a gentleman's prison, says the floor, but except for the slightly emphatic floor, window and stone bench the scene says nothing; it leaves the stage to the Dramatist and the Actors.

♣ Learn the essentials of stage scenery, and you will in time learn the essentials of Drama.

G. C.

REPRODUCED FROM "THE MASK," VOL. III.

For a perfect drama, should it some day be possible to write one, the sky must be used as the only worthy background. The manager or producer reveals his estimate of the value of Shakespeare by the elaboration or simplicity of his background.

The above design (a wood-engraving of the sixteenth century) is an example of a simple background. The lines are but little broken. In no way do they frustrate the dramatic intention. Scenery has to speak as well as the actors but it is better when it says only that which is necessary.

Here we see that we need to have it explained that the scene is an interior, a prison. It is a gentleman's prison, says the floor, but except for the slightly emphatic floor, the window, and stone bench, the scene says nothing: it leaves the stage to the Dramatist and the Actors. Learn the essentials of stage scenery, and you will in time learn the essentials of Drama.

His own early work followed these principles, but he soon passed on to a more advanced conception. He would not reform the old scenery—would not waste time untangling a tangle—he would create anew.

From his study of the evolution of the stage setting from one architectural *Scene* to changeable scenery, painted on canvas-and-wood devices of *quinte*, or wings, used in conjunction with sky-borders and back-cloths, he conceived the possibility of creating "one scene with a changeable face", a scene which should combine the grand

qualities of the architectural scene of antiquity with the changeability and variety demanded by the Shakespearean and the modern drama. Such a scene, he knew, would be of greater service to the drama than stacks of scenery which had to be laboriously shifted. It would be of greater service than the revolving stage of Japan, with its sequence of set scenes, towards which Western managers were looking for a solution of the problem. It would, in fact, render this obsolete.

Work on this idea occupied him for several years. The first expression which he gave to it was an ideal one, intended to inspire, not to give working plans. This expression was in his series of etchings, *Scene*, done in Florence, in 1907, in a fire of enthusiasm. For this set of designs and for a few other separate ones, he temporarily deserted his favourite medium of wood-cutting. He was initiated into the process of etching by Stephen Haweis, and quickly mastered the technique.

His dedication of the series, *Scene*, "To Old Bach", emphasises, the idea from which they sprang, the idea of finding the visible equivalent to musical sound.

When the poet Francis Thompson apostrophises the setting sun with the words,

Thy visible music-blasts make deaf the sky,
Thy cymbals clang to fire the Occident,
Thou dost thy dying so triumphally:
I see the crimson blaring of thy shawms!

he recognises the correspondence between dramatic sights and sounds which Gordon Craig realises in his way in his stage designs and very notably in his etchings for *Scene*.

With elementary geometric forms and a play of light and shadow, the etchings give an impression as of notes and melodic sequences, chords and dischords, and claim kinship with the music of Bach.

In an essay, "Proposals Old and New," a dialogue between a theatrical manager and an artist of the theatre, the artist emphasises that the designs which he draws on paper are not intended for adaptation to a stage. They are to create an impression. It is idle to tell him that his drawings cannot be realised in a theatre when he has never had any supposition that they could be: "A design for a scene on paper is one thing; a scene on the stage is another. The two have no connection with each other. Each depends on a hundred different ways and means of creating the same impression."

The *ways and means* of creating a dramatic impression, without copying or attempting to translate his drawings to the stage, now occupied Gordon Craig. He was determined to make a serious and systematic study, for stage purposes, of the art of "painting with light". He knew that for some centuries a few men had been searching how to use light in the creation of Scene—not merely how to light a painted scene. He was convinced

that the principle was proper to the stage and the only right one for the modern era. Painting scenes with colour from a pail was out of date and out of place in theatres. It was stupid, expensive, and artless, and served only for trivial sceneries or *décors*; but a serious and directly dramatic system for the creation of *Scene* was now at last, in the age of electricity, capable of being evolved. Being an artist, he was less eager to produce flashy results which could be tricked up in a trice than he was to experiment and discover. "It is not any gain to an art to have such a force as electricity at your disposal unless you have the power to control it. It may take an exceptional artist of very clear vision anything between thirty and forty years to acquire such power. Consider a moment more. Take the case of the average horse . . . or a strong fish. Ask anyone acquainted with riding bronchos and with angling for salmon how long it takes to master these tricky creatures. The sea . . . ask a sailor how long it takes to master that. And electric light. . . . How long? Do you think that electric light is mastered by turning a switch and then turning it again? And because you can turn it slowly as well as quickly, you have no more mastered the tremendous thing than you have walked when you have been carried in your nurse's arms. And so, while we have wonderful instruments to-day in our theatres, we perhaps do not achieve the half that the Bibienas

achieved in 1700; or Peruzzi and Serlio in 1500; or Brunelleschi in 1400. It would need a volume to explain how and where we have lost our art of scenic control while acquiring more and better instruments. Yet it could easily be written, as the documents for such a book are copious." This passage, which was written some years later, explains the artist's governing thought.

The instrument of light which he set out to master was to be related to a scene especially designed to reflect it. As the etchings represented, not a number of different scenes, but one scene under a number of aspects, so the stage model which he now made was one place and easily modifiable. He called it "*The thousand scenes in one scene.*" It was designed to give theatre artists—dramatists, actors, and designers—an escape from unnecessary limitations of time and space, limitations from which writers had already claimed the right to escape. Perhaps only practitioners of the theatre are in a position to realise the full value of this aim. Experience must have impressed on these the existence of the handicaps which the artist's invention removed.

Imitations of the simple lines of his early designs, and articles on the virtues of "The Simple Theatre" began to appear. But though he started from elementary forms he had no intention of restricting himself to any such creed of simplicity as was supposed. He was not so "simple". From the

most elementary beginning he wished to evolve to an intricacy no less involved than that of a symphony from which, because of the proper subordination of the parts to the whole, the impression may still be one of simplicity, but a simplicity which is inimitable.

There are two forms of "cribbing": that in which something is added to the idea appropriated, and that in which something less than the idea is reproduced—Shakespeare cribbed magnificently in the first way: the eighteenth-century dramatists cribbed in the second way. Gordon Craig's way of cribbing was Shakespeare's way. He absorbed impressions and added his individuality to any expression which he gave to them. The logic and simplicity of his early designs was in some measure influenced by the Austrian architect, Joseph Hoffman, whose work showed a realisation of the musical and dramatic value of geometric forms. The German architects, Max Laenger and Otto Wagner, came into prominent notice in the year 1907 (the date of Gordon Craig's etchings) with designs which were somewhat similarly inspired. This new spirit in architecture was carried to America where it developed rapidly. From America it is returning to Europe and is transforming its cities.

The spacing and proportion in Gordon Craig's drawings and their ethereal qualities were said to be impossible of realisation on a stage by those

who mentally tried to translate them in terms of the familiar canvas and paint. But the artist knew that practice with his device of a "Scene with a mobile face" would give him the power over line and space, over light and shadow, which would make possible the seemingly "impossible".

No display of superficial "cleverness" can be made with this Scene. It is as elementary as a pipe and only with art can it be commanded to any utterance of harmony. Its expression cannot be said to be "all" a matter of this or "only" a matter of that—it is the result of a co-ordination of forces: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this organ. So the designer believed and believes.

The mobility of this device is intended to enable the theatre to show such visions as those of the dramatic poet of whom it is said, "He sees Nature full of sentiment and excitement; he sees men and women as parts of Nature, passionate, excited, in strange grouping and connection with the grandeur and beauty of the natural world."

X

THE MASK AND THE UBER-MARIONETTE

MARCH, 1908, saw the foundation of *The Mask*, a journal of the Art of the Theatre, as a monthly. The object of the publication was stated in the prospectus to be, "to bring before an intelligent public many ancient and modern aspects of the Theatre's Art which have too long been disregarded or forgotten. Not to attempt to assist in the so-called reform of the modern theatre—for reform is now too late; not to advance theories which have not already been tested, but to announce the existence of a vitality which already begins to reveal itself in a beautiful and definite form based upon an ancient and noble tradition." The journal was published in Florence and distributed to the principal cities of the world. London publishers were dubious, and said it would require a capital of at least thirty thousand pounds to found such a publication. Actually it made its way on "a few ghostly pounds".

The first number contained a chapter from the *Architettura* of Serlio with reproductions of the "Tragic Scene", the "Comic Scene", and the

"Satyric Scene", and essays by E. W. Godwin, as representing high traditions of the past. Essays by Gordon Craig and others gave evidence of the present and prophecies of the future.

Gordon Craig's essay on "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette", and his plea for the return to the use of dramatic masks strangely disturbed the equanimity of the professional theatre. Though Shelley, Coleridge, and Lamb had also expressed a wish for the use of masks to be re-studied, the idea was scouted as a perversity peculiar to Gordon Craig. It was not realised that in writing of the marionette and of the mask as he did, he was writing of the *World of Ideas*—of that world which Plato postulated as a necessity by which to measure human experience, a world related to earthly actualities but, as an ideal, above them. When a poet or a philosopher writes of this world of ideas and a pedestrian mind tries to understand him in terms of humdrum experience, there is certain to be misunderstanding and confusion with a consequent exasperation and loss of temper. This is what now happened in the case of Craig, for he wrote in a poetic idiom. Taken literally, his sense appeared to be nonsense.

When he wrote the unfortunate sentence, "The actor must go and in his place comes the inanimate figure—the Uber-Marionette as we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name," there was no need for any member of the Actors' Associa-

tion or the Actors' Equity, to suppose that a renegade brother was proposing to exterminate him or to rob him of occupation. It was not to be taken as a personal insult—yet it was so taken. Like the "Wait and see" of Asquith, in the political world, it was wrested from its context, in which it was of special significance and certainly inoffensive, and was used for years most unscrupulously, stupidly and wearisomely to damage the author's reputation and to prevent him from coming into his own in the English Theatre.

Interpreted in the world of ideas to which it belongs, Craig's otherwise puzzling sentence means that the weak idea of the actor, as "a feather for each wind that blows" from personal emotions, must be replaced by a nobler one, the ideal of the image in which personal emotion is controlled and transformed. Diderot has emphasised, in *Le Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (the only serious treatise on acting to precede this essay of Craig's), that natural emotion must not be confounded with the expression of art—the actor who is a prey to jealousy is not at that moment the best qualified to represent the jealousy of Othello. Art is expression differing in some way from the natural and calling for a style of its own. Such expression is seen in the durable images of the great sculptors. It is seen in the dramatic masks of Greece, of Italy, of India, China, and Japan. The actor who has appreciated the significance of such clearly defined

forms carries in his mind a vivid standard from which he may derive principles of expression. As has been recognised earlier, no prescription for acting can be given by the schools, but standards of measurement can be derived from the analysis of the great models.

The idea represented by the symbol of the Uber-Marionette is the idea of Perfection, the idea of an absolute correspondence between thought and emotion and the form through which these are expressed. That idea was the magnet which drew the art of Edmund Kean and his peers to the heights of dramatic expression. All phenomenal actors approximate to that correspondence of form and spirit which is exemplified in durable form in the great sculptural images of art. For this reason Irving had been a student of sculpture, and for this reason Irving's acting was a fascination to the great sculptor Alfred Gilbert. For this reason, also, Craig brought the idea of the Uber-Marionette back into the consciousness of artists of the modern theatre.

But why couldn't he say that plainly straight away, instead of causing all this to-do, if that was all he meant, the actor may ask, in injured tone. Craig may reply, why did Shakespeare write such involved sentences as, "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York?" The answer is that by so doing he arrests attention and invites us to explore a world of

imagery where we may discover for ourselves wonders at which language can only hint.

Craig's essay, "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette", is one of the instinctive utterances of his which have earned for him the title of being, "The first æsthetician of the theatre". In it he does not dogmatise—to knock all the wonders out of the theatre was far from his intention—but he leads the actor to the pass-road which divides mediocrity from distinction, and the pretence of the mock theatre from the realities of the Fine Arts.

At the end of the year, 1908, Gordon Craig was able to take the Arena Goldoni, an open-air theatre in Florence (for a yearly rental which would not have sufficed for half-a-week, in London, so it was not the eccentric move it was represented to be). Here he made his head-quarters and he had the publishing office of *The Mask*.

His fame abroad was growing. In each country of Europe there was at least one man in a position of command who endorsed his views and gave a lead to opinion in his favour.

Max Reinhardt, in 1908, invited him to produce *King Lear*. He made designs for this, but again the management tried to force a compromise which he did not regard as necessary. Reinhardt renewed his invitation to Craig, and next proposed that they should together produce the *Orestia* in the Circus, Berlin. Craig had too great a respect for the masterpiece of antiquity to attempt that

form of resuscitation. Failing to draw the artist into these toils, Reinhardt went ahead himself, with Ernst Stern as his designer, and produced instead, the *Oedipus*. He later tried his hand with the *Orestia*, when the Grosses Schauspielhaus was built, but he only proved that the theatre of to-day has lost the secret of presenting such mighty themes.

Some years later, in his Foreword to *The Theatre Advancing*, Gordon Craig accounted for these refusals to attempt to produce a play while denied absolute control of the materials. The radical difference between his point of view and that of contemporary dramatic criticism was then shown in a comparison which was drawn by a writer who, confident of his own logic, likened Gordon Craig to an ecclesiastic who was voluble about his high intentions of service but who suddenly remarked, "No, I shall not take service in that Cathedral. You must build me a special Cathedral of my own. Then I may do you the honour." It would have surprised this critic had it been pointed out to him that there is no logical comparison to be made between a man who preaches a sermon and one whose aim is to produce the art proper to the theatre, that is, plastic drama. A comparison with a Cellini denied his bronze would be a just one.

In 1909, Craig wrote these reflections on his position, "I am now at the point for which I was

making sixteen years ago, and it is because I realise this that I wonder how it is that I have no theatre. Or rather I would put it this way; how is it that people have not seen the positive need to provide themselves with a theatre? I will not go about to obtain it for them in the usual way because it is not a usual thing which I demand, and therefore ordinary tactics would be unavailing. That is to say, I could not have reached the point I have done in my art if I had followed all those conventions which it is customary to follow when you set out to become the proprietor of a theatre. And had I followed all those conventions—that is to say, had I played at tame dog all my life, I should *undoubtedly* have now possessed a theatre of my own without a scrap of spirit to put into it; and as that is the one thing which the theatre lacks—spirit—I should have added another tombstone of a theatre to the dramatic graveyard.”

Surveying the spiritless theatre, he asks, “Was there ever such a spectacle as this poor stage has presented for centuries? In fact, I have passed through London and found no other woman so poor and so low as she is. And for that reason, I intend to do all I can to place her higher than anyone else.”

But the London theatre was not then asking for his proffered gesture of chivalric sympathy. It was complacent in its forgetfulness of higher states.

It would have been astonished indeed if it could have looked ahead to the time when Sir Oswald Stoll would echo this "madman's" theory of the art of the theatre in a column of the *Daily Express*, hailing it as the only way to dramatic and financial salvation. (This wonder came about on April 2—not April the 1st—of the present year, 1931.)

Though Gordon Craig found the theatre metamorphosed into a fallen woman, he remembered and could not forget that the highest intellects of the world's history had been devoted to it in other states. It must therefore be in reality a huge thing, not a woman at all. It exasperated him more than anything else when people narrowed the *idea* of the theatre. He said, "Please believe me when I tell you that it is a MOUNTAIN. It is not a hill, nor a group of hills, nor a mirage of hills—it is the largest mountain I have ever seen."

He held that unless this largest mountain was taken as the standard, the world would be accepting the tenth-rate, mistaking it for the first-rate:

And the first-rate is not Shakespeare, but Æschylus. But Æschylus refuses to enter a closed-in theatre, with its artificial light, and refuses to be entirely comprehensible to any but Greeks—to those Greeks who are dead. But this much we English can comprehend: it is that *our* highest standard of drama is that mingled literary and theatrical art which Shakespeare gave us as

drama. Feeling this, I suppose, I have never yet dared to design a scene for Æschylus, although I have read his Trilogy heaven knows how many times. They act them to-day in closed-in theatres, and they prance and gesticulate, and even venture phonetically to speak his lines in Greek. Why not let the old monument alone? It stands there crumbling away; better not touch it, better to build up outside, taking it as a standard.

While trying to establish himself on this better way, he still maintained his affection for the contemporary theatre though he was so constituted that he was forced to throw continual challenges and to tease both himself and it whenever they were brought into contact.



"SCENE FOR *Othello*—OR ANY OTHER PLAY," 1910
By Gordon Craig.

XI

A RETURN TO ENGLAND

IN 1909, there came a sign from the English theatre in the form of a proposal to Craig that he should design the scenes for a production of *Macbeth* at His Majesty's Theatre, under the management of Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

As a proved stage director, the task of being "a purveyor of sceneries" for other producers was not from the outset agreeable to Gordon Craig, for his style was too individual to be combined with the established methods. In inviting him to co-operate, Tree was perhaps actuated more by his regard for Ellen Terry than by trust in the genius of her son. He had a fine record of success in a convention which he had chosen and had steadily maintained. Though the most enterprising manager of the time, a certain amount of conservatism made him cautious of drastic change—he "knew the difficulties".

Craig with his faith that a right principle, if practised without compromise, must triumph, was prepared to leap over what he regarded as the bogey difficulties. He saw the increasing threat

of the cinema—saw the actors going over to the thing that was presently to destroy what was best in the old profession. Only a new and vivid move, without unnecessary compromise, could re-assert the attraction of the art of the old house. Half-measures could not save the theatre. It was worth “All or Nothing”. This is a doctrine which is not to be forced on others, in daily life (as Ibsen has shown, in *Brand* and in *The Wild Duck*). An artist must none the less demand it for his work. Craig thought he knew the moment at which to compromise but the London theatre seemed to him to be compromising all the time. He would willingly compromise with conditions when once his guiding Idea was acknowledged. To compromise before that seemed to be certain death to his work.

However it was not Gordon Craig who broke the contract but the hesitant theatre manager. This was the last serious proposal that Gordon Craig received from any London management, and its failure to materialise gave a handle to his opponents one of whom went so far, in 1923, as to publish the libel that he was “unemployable”.

The truth of the happenings at His Majesty's Theatre was not given publicity until the publication, in 1924, of *Studio and Stage* by Joseph Harker, in which book that prosperous scene-painter recounted with complacency and glee, as though it were a matter for legitimate pride how he succeeded

in persuading Tree to reject Gordon Craig's models. "Unhappy Harker, your name will survive in this connection," wrote a discerning critic. "You will be remembered as typical of those sturdy professionals, who alas! not content with that great share of lucrative success which naturally falls to them, but spurred by a curious suspicion of the genuine artist, proceed to wreck even those rare chances which come their way. Unhappy Harker! Those pleasant picnic spots you painted for Shakespeare's characters to play in, those castles which outview a railway company's advertisement, are forgotten by those who enjoyed them and remembered with contempt by those who did not. 'Wholesome realism,' the phrase is yours: you understood how to provide it, but why did you do your best to prevent our ever seeing even anything else? 'With the oft repeated assertion that there is room for improvement in scene designing and painting I am heartily in accord. But . . .' We know the value of that kind of 'accord'!"

In his designs, Craig sometimes represents the human figure as more diminutive than the natural height of men and sometimes of greater height. In this he follows a recognised practice of artists like Blake who emphasise the fact that art is related to nature but is not the same thing. The actor, Garrick, who was a very little man, was able to give the impression of shrinking yet further or

of towering like a giant, in a wide range of dramatic expression. The lament that Craig's designs "dwarf the actor" showed the failure to learn the lesson which the drawings had power to teach. Harker was able to work on this prejudice and with his foot-rule to convince Tree that the roof would have to be taken off His Majesty's Theatre if Craig's high and mighty scenes were to be accommodated. But Craig's way of obtaining impressions of the high and the mighty was a way which did not enter into Harker's calculations at all; it was based on the principle of relativity.

Gordon Craig's comment on this curious experience of the ways of the London stage can be seen in his design which is given as the frontispiece to *On the Art of the Theatre*, 1911, a drawing which with some humour he calls "The Masque of London". It represents two flights of precarious steps, one leading up a precipice to an undiscovered country, the other leading nowhere—the alternatives offered to artists of the theatre. "Quite an impossible scene of course; that is to say impossible to realise on a stage. But I wanted to know for once what it felt like to be mounting up impossible ladders and beckoning people to come after me." The design therefore contains a self-portrait easily recognisable by those who know the artist.

The actors who might be expected to respond to an invitation promising such adventure are notice-

ably absent from the picture. There is only one explorer plodding somewhat heavily after the gaily beckoning figure who dances lightly on ahead. Another figure, limp, and half-dead with following an unpractical "back stairs" policy, is descending the alternative stair. He is seen with his back to the Morning Star and is holding an inverted torch in his hand. He is small but he can hardly be called insignificant, he is the soul of compromise.

The essays in *On the Art of the Theatre* may all be regarded as providing the minds of theatre students with exercise. As a painter or a connoisseur places his hand now over one part and then over another of a work of art, blocking out the rest for a moment, in his effort to estimate the value of the parts to the whole composition, so Gordon Craig blocked out first one part and then another of the constituents of the theatre with the purpose of securing their proper order and perspective. He blocked out words altogether for the moment, humorously, suggesting that in *Sprechen Streng Verboten* might lie the secret theatric expression. "He would cut out the tongue of the theatre," was the criticism he provoked. "He is hostile to literature," said William Archer: This was as far from the truth as if he had said hostile to the hills or hostile to the sea. A greater critic once observed that while he had known many writers who were blind to visual art, he had

never known of a visual artist who was unappreciative of literature.

Max Reinhardt's productions of *Sumerun* and *The Miracle* showed at this time that people could be pleased with a "slap-up" experiment in the direction of silent drama. Isadora Duncan, with her company of children, proved very much more.

Craig next blocked out actors and acting, and looked at what was left. "There is no room for the actor in Gordon Craig's theatre. The sun is the centre of his universe," cried one, in answer to the reminder that there is a drama of Nature as well as of human nature. "He has a passion for everything connected with the theatre except actors and drama," said another.

Whilst denying the responsibility of the writer and designer, London managers were hypnotised, it would seem almost without being conscious of the fact, into trying their hand with the ideas put forward.

One of these surprised his following by suddenly changing from the type of "natural" production of Shaw and the modern literary drama to the production of "futurist" Shakespeare and "futurist" Shaw.

Those who liked it gave the manager the credit, those who resented it gave Craig the blame.

The terms *Expressionism* and *Stylisation* with which a new race of dramatic critics began to

irritate the old, as a result of the disturbance which Craig's ferment of thought began to cause, were merely an elementary recognition of the fact that art is expression differing in some way from the natural and calling for a style of its own.

Inevitably some high-spirited young producers, fancying that they had "got the idea", deluded themselves into a conviction that by merely being as crudely different from Nature as their wits could devise, they must logically arrive at the Art about which Gordon Craig was writing. In distilling Craig's ideas "through monkey-shines of their own", they caused some bewilderment to the public and risked discrediting the originator.

On July 16, 1911, Mr. Craig was entertained at a dinner in his honour, at which over two hundred distinguished guests were present, representative of Painting, Music, and Literature but, alas! few of the theatre. William Rothenstein presided. The Secretary of the Moscow Art Theatre, Mr. Michael Lykiadopoulos, who happened to be in London, was able to speak of the forthcoming production which Gordon Craig was preparing for the Russian theatre.

Craig had received an invitation from the directors of that theatre, who included Stanislawski, its founder, in 1908, asking him to visit them. After staying a month, he was asked to select a play which he would like to produce, and he had chosen *Hamlet*. In 1909 and in 1911 he

had paid two more visits to supervise the preparations. The illness of Stanislawski in 1910 had caused some delay.

Mr. Lykiadopoulos, speaking of the preparations said, "The Moscow Art Theatre is indeed proud to have been the first European stage on whose boards Mr. Gordon Craig was able to materialise his artistic vision and to realise on the completest scale possible those ideals, which born in England, were cradled in Moscow. Mr. Gordon Craig was, I fear, regarded by many of you some years ago as an alchemist searching for a philosopher's stone in the art of the theatre—a philosopher's stone which would turn everything into gold. It was the privilege of the Moscow Art Theatre to provide that alchemist with the materials by which the philosopher's stone may be found. In a few months Moscow, St. Petersburg, and I hope London, will see *Hamlet* produced in a manner not unworthy of Shakespeare's genius, and a new chapter will be opened in the history of the art of the theatre."

Craig had decided to use for this production a scene which he derived from the idea represented by his set of etchings of 1907—a version of the "one scene with a changeable face". *The Times* of September 23, 1911, gave an account of the scene, written after a model demonstration of its use, which recounted its practical advantages and concluded, "It is certainly of wonderful effect in

the suggestion of place and mood; and experiment with the models only whets the appetite to see a stage equipped with the new scenery on the full scale."

With the optimism on which the Patent Office thrives, Craig took out patents for his invention, which from the prosaic view of the Office was merely a set of screens made with reversible joints and able to stand by themselves, dispensing with the braces, struts, pulleys, ropes, and counterweights of the changeable sceneries. The panels might be of varying height and width. They were of neutral cream colour generally, though for the Moscow production some were touched with gold.

Their dramatic value lay in the formations which they were able to take on, the ease with which the transitions could be made, and in the modifications which could be given to them by "painting with light". Through them Craig aimed to organise, Time, Space and Force in the interests of the dramatist, the actor and the spectator, and to draw from them visible music. Only an artist of very great ability could do that with them, but they offered elementary advantages to the most modest of theatre enthusiasts.

A note on the programme for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, for January, 1911, written by W. B. Yeats, says, "The method of decoration in *The Deliverer* and *The Hour Glass* was invented by Mr. Gordon Craig, and will be used by the Art Theatre of

Moscow, where it will make possible the performance of the full *Hamlet*, with a different decoration for every little scene, so rapidly can the scenes be changed. Thursday night will, however, be its first public use. It does not aim at effects of realism, but at a decoration of the stage almost infinite in the variety of its expression and suggestion, and for the first time makes possible effects of lights and shadows various, powerful and delicate. Mr. Craig has given us the right to make use of his patent in Ireland, with the generosity of a great artist, and because he respects our work and ambition."

The long-anticipated production of *Hamlet* was given in Moscow on January 8, 1912. The Moscow correspondent of the London theatrical newspaper, the *Era*, in a letter to his editor, denied all knowledge of the existence of the Art Theatre or of any such production. "After this, one may indeed ask, *which* Era?" said *The Mask*, on hearing this story. A correspondent of *The Times* reported that "Mr. Craig has the singular power of carrying the spiritual significance of the words and dramatic situations beyond the actor to the scene in which he moves. By the simplest means he is able, in some mysterious way, to evoke almost any sensation of time and space, the scenes even in themselves suggesting variations of human emotion. . . . Whatever Mr. Craig has done he has obviously done not only with the

touch of an artist, but also with all the care and reverence of a true lover of Shakespeare."

In the introduction to the French edition of *On The Art of the Theatre*, M. Jacques Rouché, the director of the *Théâtre des Arts* and of the *Opéra*, Paris wrote—

"Les théories de Mr. Craig m'étaient déjà connues et je m'y intéressais vivement, mais il m'éte donné récemment d'en apprécier toute l'application au Théâtre d'Art, de Moscou, en voyant *Hamlet*. Cette simplicité grandiose, qui permet au verbe de rayonner sur la scène entière, laisse des impressions ineffaçables: on se sent en présence d'une œuvre entièrement originale et que l'esprit anime en son ensemble comme en chacune de ses parties. On comprend alors la forme que l'auteur veut donner à l'œuvre d'art de l'avenir, l'effort qui conduira, après avoir stylisé le décor et le personnage, à la suppression de l'artiste et, comme dit Gabriele d'Annunzio, au fameux asservissement de la Nature à l'Art.

"Les évolutions dans des lignes architecturales, de monarques recouvert—jusqu'aux cheveux même—des tissus d'or, empêchent de situer l'action dans un lieu connu puérilement reconstitué. Ainsi la fiction du décor correspond à celle du poète. Jamais scène ne m'a plus ému que l'enterrement d'Ophélie et, cependant, le régisseur inscrit sur son journal de conduite ces deux lignes: 5 colonnes en toile gris, 6 figurantes, 2 torches et 3 petites fleurs blanches."

It is curious that Stanislawski's account of the event, given in his book *My Life in Art*, which

was first published in America as a preliminary puff to the visit of the company in 1924, contains the remark that "if a simple screen fell all the others followed".

This statement has of course been seized on with delight by those who like to hug the delusion that the artist cannot possibly be practical. It does not strike them that even the landscapes of a Joseph Harker will collapse if they are stupidly handled and that the reflection would be on the clumsiness of the staff not on the skill of the designer. It rather looks as though some imp of mischief has doctored Stanislawski's account to make it fit in with the legend of Craig as only a magnificent dreamer. Gordon Craig's laughing comment was: "My screens did not fall over and anyone who says that they did is inventing merely to give me pleasure. But they *shall* fall over in future. I will see to it that if at any time the little invention is to be put on the London stage, they shall fall as well as do everything else. To be a success in London, a fall is essential." (*Morning Post*, Sept. 17, 1926.)

Mr. Lennox Robinson, one of the directors of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, tells another tale saying of the screens, "They are easy to handle and capable of being arranged in an endless number of combinations, in fifteen years we have not exhausted their uses, practically all our "romantic" scenes are created out of them, they are as versatile

as our players. In the matter of costume something equivalent to these screens must be sought by a repertory theatre."

The designer himself wrote of this "Thousand Scenes in One", in *The Mask* of 1914-1915, and again in his book *Scene*, in 1923.

When, after long striving for a School, he at last obtained the promise of support, two large models of the scene were the first things made, and it was only in these models that the device behaved itself quite to the satisfaction of the artist.

Gordon Craig has since shown, in other productions, that he is not bound to this one formula for his idea of one scene with a changeable face. But this in the most elementary type. From working with this primary form, students of dramatic art would be compelled to realise, if they have it in them to do so, the mathematical laws to which theatrical art no less than any other must be related.

Gordon Craig has said of his master, Irving, "His movements were all measured. He was for ever counting." This sense of number which had been demonstrated in the Lyceum productions, Craig possessed or was possessed by. The search of Helmholtz for the mathematical law governing musical sound has led to the discovery of the wonder of wireless transmission. We do not know what Craig's search may yet lead to dramatically.

XII

THE SCHOOL

DURING 1912, after the production of *Hamlet* in Russia, Gordon Craig gave his mind and time to forming an international committee for the establishment of the School for the Art of the Theatre, in the necessity for which all his belief was fixed. He had to be both the artist and the organiser since no "Edmund Reinhardt" appeared at his side, no business man who would take a large view of his proposals and treat them as an investment.

The January Number of *The Mask* printed an essay by the poet and dramatist, Mr. Laurence Binyon, on "The Gordon Craig School: A Recognition of the Need for It," asking, "Will not England, will not Englishmen make this school a reality?" And one by Dr. George Baltruschaitus, of the Moscow Art Theatre, on "The Path of Gordon Craig" was also printed. This closed with the hope that "England, the Fatherland of progress" would give its son the possibility of working towards his ideal in the Experimental School which the nature of his gift to the world required.

The committee issued a prospectus with a preface outlining the object of the scheme and Gordon Craig's qualifications for its direction. The formation of a society to be known as *The Society of the Theatre*, to work in conjunction with the School, was also announced.

The Mask of February was able to celebrate *A Red Letter Day in the History of the Theatre* (appropriately using red ink for the heading)—THE GORDON CRAIG SCHOOL, Established February 27, 1913. This was the birthday of Ellen Terry. A Patron had expressed willingness to provide a certain guarantee.

The sum which Gordon Craig asked for in *On the Art of the Theatre* was five thousand pounds a year for five years. Many a state theatre is subsidised to a far higher figure than that. Thousands more are lost in a week in futile dabbling in theatres, by "practical" men.

Craig's notion of what was practical was different from this. My practical is your unpractical, and your practical is my unpractical, he might have said to his critics. It was practical to start the School in Florence where he had secured a theatre, with work-rooms, store-rooms and offices at a yearly rental of about a hundred pounds. It was practical to go to the country richest in records of theatrical art, since the assemblage of these was a part of the purpose of the undertaking. It was practical to enable the students to study in an environment

conducive to æsthetic perception and good health. He was instinctively feeling his way towards conditions such as those enjoyed by "The Artists of Dionysos" who anciently made the theatre of Athens supreme. He asked for, "New Lives then—new habits—a new order of work and a new notion of how much work and *what* work makes an actor. New sights and sounds around my men to breed in them new feelings, new thoughts. . . . and open eyes. New roads for them to step out on which breeds a new rhythm and a new carriage. New air for them to breathe, breeding in them new health, new notions of an old friendship. No new promises. No promises at all. New purpose. WILL at last. . . . After that it only remains for the dramatic spirit to honour us by appearing in our midst."

"I cannot teach, I need my school solely to learn in," said the unconventional master with disconcerting honesty. And he set about paving a path of theatrical learning for students to follow, each in his degree. All were engaged in handwork as a preparation for headwork. They were set to drill marble, model a mask, carve a marionette, saw a plank, paint a canvas, build a model scene, or break a hole in a wall for the electric plugs—all of which occupations are part and parcel of stage-managing.

Classes for speaking and singing were held, and classes for design and pattern making. Machines

for lighting were made and used. Lists of books, papers, prints, and indexes were made and great tidiness kept. Translations of French, Italian, and German books of value to theatre students were made when no translation existed. Three exhibitions were held or largely contributed to at Zurich, Warsaw and Budapest. The museum and library grew and contained some valuable items, each purchased for a song, having been found by searchers looking where others seldom seek. A collection of ancient masks and marionettes was begun.

Many visitors came to see the activities. Tommaso Salvini was a frequent onlooker and was always grave and courteous. He had been greatly impressed by Gordon Craig's work in the famous production of *Rosmersholm*.

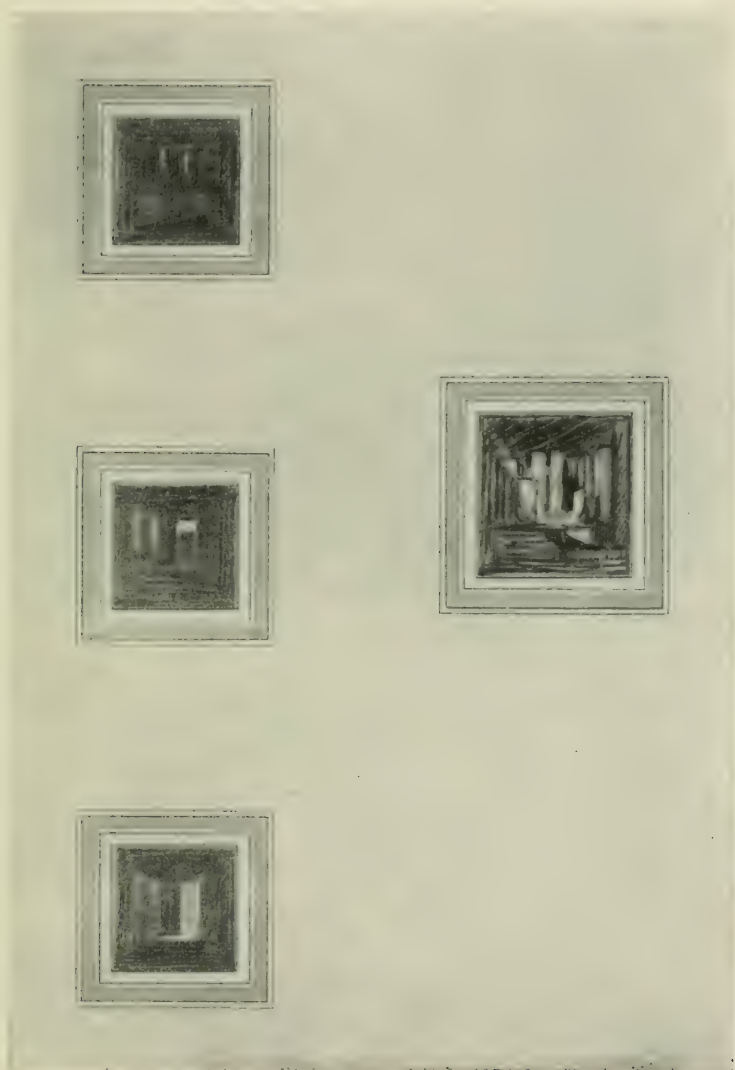
The company was about thirty strong. Everything that was needed in the work of the stage was made by the students, and they electrically wired and completely fitted out the arena.

Gordon Craig then, made certain experiments, the results of which he recorded. He was fascinated by a belief, which Leonardo had before him, that expression should be referred to a standard of measurement. He recorded the dramatic impressions made by the quantities, the varying directions, and the colour of the light on his scene as he varied its proportions, which were also noted. He studied the movements of the actors in relation to the scene. The records are preserved

in his library and show the path along which the leader would travel.

Besides work, relaxation had to be provided. One day in descending the hill of Costa San Giorgio, Craig noticed an excited group of Italian men, women and children, gathered around an English stage-coach. An *Inglese* had made it, an Italian count had bought it, and it was now for sale for a few hundred lire, though it must have cost several thousand. Mr. Craig saw that it would provide an excellent vehicle for the high spirits of his charges, and be a source of health and inspiration at a modest cost. After weighing the matter in his mind for a few days, "with the unnatural caution bred of difficult times", he decided to buy it. It was a handsome coach, painted black and yellow, and the sight of it speeding into the country, drawn by four black horses hired for the purpose, with its company of young men, soon amazed or amused the Florentines. Far away in London it was heard of and disapproved of, as Craig's latest extravagance and eccentricity, by people who failed to see how it was going to promote the Art of the Theatre. The "artists of Dionysos" thought their diversion harmless enough and voted the four black horses worthy of their hire. Moreover the spectacle provided a novel form of *réclame* for the School.

Another item of expenditure included in the plan of the School was that of "Birds and animals,



FOUR NOTES OF A SEQUENCE OF LIGHTING STUDIES, 1914
By Gordon Craig.

and food for the same." Why birds? Why animals? "Comic Methods for New Art School" was the headline given to the announcement by the Press which found the idea laughable. Gilbert Cannan ridiculed this item in a contemporary novel. In Italy the notion was not held to be at all strange for the School of Art housed in the Royal Palace at Monza has a section of the grounds put aside for many fine birds and animals which serve as models for the students to learn from. Certainly the designers and actors of Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs* must have studied the real creatures for their particular purpose. Gordon Craig wanted his theatre students to note the colours, forms and movements of animals and birds and derive from them something which would contribute to dramatic expression. He was in no hurry. In the spring of 1919, there seemed to be plenty of time before them all. He would take out a leaf from the note books of Hokusai who in moving towards perfection in his art could write, on nearing eighty:

From the age of six I had a passion for drawing the forms of things. By the age of fifty I had published an infinity of designs; but all that I produced before the age of seventy is of no account. Only when I was seventy-three had I got some sort of insight into the real structure of nature—animals, plants, trees, birds, fish and insects. Consequently, at the age of eighty, I shall have advanced still further; at ninety I shall grasp the

mystery of things: at a hundred, I shall be a marvel, and at a hundred and ten, every blot, every line from my brush shall be alive!

And again at ninety:

From the age of six I began to draw, and for eighty-four years I have worked independently of the schools, my thoughts all the time being turned towards drawing.

It being impossible to express everything in so small a space, I wished only to teach the difference between vermillion and crimson lake, between indigo and green, and also in a general way to teach how to handle round shapes and square, straight lines and curved: and if one day I make a sequel to this volume, I shall show children how to render the violence of ocean, the rush of rapids, the tranquillity of still pools, and among the living beings of earth, their state of weakness or strength. There are in nature birds that do not fly high, flowering trees that never fruit: all these conditions of the life we live among are worth studying thoroughly: and if ever I succeed in convincing artists of this, I shall have been the first to show the way.

That Gordon Craig was himself convinced is evident in the lines of the screens which he designed and his more advanced pupils made with him at this time. They have been seen by very few people. He still has them in his keeping and preserves them in case they should be asked for by the theatre in his lifetime. They exceed in beauty any of his published designs.

Stanislawski in 1910 said that from the school attached to his theatre, all he ever found amongst the pupils fit to draft into the company was one per cent. His system consisted of hammering in ideas. Gordon Craig tried to draw out ability by suggestions and encouraged initiative. "This may not be the methodical teaching of the schools. The results they achieve are on record and the record is nothing to boast about," said the director. He was satisfied in the first year that at least eight of his company possessed ability to catch his swing and carry on. He had, he thought, every reason to be optimistic as to the development of his work when August, 1914, brought it suddenly to a standstill.

During the dark days of the War certain savants in Paris went calmly on with their work of research into the geography of the Iliad. It was not deemed necessary that all study of art should be dropped. Max Reinhardt and his brother could still find capital which enabled them to develop plans by which to make their productions the theatrical draw of Europe at the conclusion of peace. The German Government saw the propaganda value of such a centre. The theatre was "the servant of the Fatherland".

Gordon Craig was resigned to the necessary departure of his pupils but he hoped that provision would be made for the resumption of the work on the conclusion of peace. But no such

provision was made. The School was completely broken up—"The War swept it away, and my supporter did not see the value of keeping the engine-fires 'banked'. So the fires went out."

Gordon Craig had for some years previously been dramatising himself, on the stage of *The Mask*, and elsewhere, speaking sometimes with the voice of a prophet and sometimes as a pontiff, sometimes as St. Simon Stylites. This was impressive and entertaining to those who appreciated the play, but apparently very irritating to those whom it bewildered. If his patron did not rely on his own judgement, his trust must certainly have been shaken by the critics who spent their fury on the figure which their own minds set up as "Gordon Craig" at this time. This appears to be what happened. Actually the portrait was a scarcely recognisable one. A young English actor who was introduced to the real man in 1922, exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Craig, I expected to meet something black and satanic. I meet something white and angelic."

At the end of the year 1914, the Stage Society of New York asked Gordon Craig if he would be willing to be responsible for a series of productions in New York under their auspices and asked also what he estimated would be the cost. Basing his calculation on American statistics of the rents of theatres and costs of production, he asked for a guarantee of 100,000 dollars. The Society took

steps to raise a fund, but only succeeded in obtaining 30,000 dollars.

The Mask later revealed the artist's mind on the proposal, "No tried artist in his senses is going to travel to New York, and on getting there have to form a company of actors—have his whole theatre overhauled—and scenes made, just to make a small splash for eight weeks in a puddle of 30,000 dollars." Another English producer took the risk of accepting that guarantee only to prove that it was an utterly inadequate sum for productions on even a moderate scale. "Reasonable", was exactly what Gordon Craig proved himself to be in setting the minimum at 100,000 dollars. He had so identified himself with a vision of a new theatre that he felt it would be a betrayal of his trust if he were tempted merely to gamble.

During the first years of the War, Gordon Craig worked in Rome. While studying the theatre books in the library of the Museum, in 1914, he first saw a copy of Nicola Sabbatini's *Practica di Fabrica Scene e Machine ne' Teatri*, 1638, a work which summarises the practice of sixteenth-century scenographers and illustrates the first principles of the structure of the *scena stabile*, the built scene. He found in the diagrams a curious likeness to an arrangement of his "Thousand Scenes in One" which he had made for the production of *Hamlet* in Moscow.

His studio in Rome was visited by many notable people. In 1916, he was one day told that a lady wished to see his work. This visitor proved to be Eleonora Duse, another unemployed artist of the theatre. Remembering how powerless she had been to fulfil her former intentions of furthering his opportunities, she appeared rather timid and hoped he was not angry. Anger with her was out of the question. She entered the studio with the beauty of movement, and assumed the fair attitude for which she was famed. In the presence of this apparition the artist could not give full attention to his own stage and the model scene refused to act that day.

Gordon Craig still retained the Arena Goldoni, of which he held a long lease, but in December, 1916, he received notice by telegram from the Italian military authorities, commandeering the premises, and allowing him only a few days in which to vacate them. He appealed to the British Ambassador in Rome, Sir Rennell Rodd, asking him to beg the authorities to allow him to retain a part of the buildings sufficient for the storage of his property; he explained that "The Arena Goldoni and church which is attached to it contain my studio and workshops, a theatre and museum. I have five models there, the largest of which takes up half the church. They are the result of my own and my pupils' labour for the last nine years, and represent an outlay for raw

materials of £4,000, not counting the expenditure for the years of labour of skilled workmen. The larger models cannot be removed or taken apart without reducing them to a worthless heap of firewood. Quite aside from the fact that the materials cannot be replaced without a great outlay of money which is not at my disposal, the workmen whom I have trained cannot be found again. The destruction of these models means the complete ruin of my career; they represent the visible exposition of my ideas on which depends my entire future."

Representations were made by the British Embassy to the Italian authorities who, when they realised the importance of the work, in this cradle of art, sent permission for it to be exempted from interference—but the order arrived too late. The models with their intricate lighting and wood-work had been broken up; the artist and master was able to save only some of the pieces.

The Office of *The Mask* shrank to a Post Office box, measuring eight inches, by nine, by twelve. The Arena became a barracks. It was afterwards destroyed and with it many of Gordon Craig's immediate and dearest hopes for the theatre.

Soon after the conclusion of peace, he addressed a letter to the editor of *The Observer* which has historic interest:

SIR—In your issue of November 9, the following passage occurs in Mr. William Archer's remarkable article on "The National Theatre":

It is an only too open secret that the lack of such a theatre was felt during the war to be a serious gap in our national equipment. The Germans made great play with "Dramatic propaganda" in neutral countries, and, time and again, British representatives in these countries begged earnestly that something might be done to counter such attractive advertisements of the German genius. Inquiries and proposals were made in half a dozen quarters, but it was found impossible to put in the field anything that could for a moment bear comparison with the work of Max Reinhardt.

After reading this curious passage I tried to think what artists the English theatre could boast of, and whether someone of talent could not have been found whose work would "have born comparison with the work of Max Rheinhardt".

I must say that I soon found a group of names of men whose combined talents would actually equal the combined talents of the fifteen to thirty artists, craftsmen and men of affairs who make up the sum total known to us as "Max Reinhardt", for Max Rheinhardt is a Firm, not an artist. Professor Rheinhardt is a very capable actor, with an especial talent for choosing other men to do the rest of his work for him.

But it is not to concern myself with the German stage that I write to you; it is to ask your assistance for our own theatre. Can you do something towards instituting an inquiry into the matters touched on by Mr. Archer in the passage I have quoted? Can you help us all to learn, for example, what "inquiries" and what "proposals" were made "in half a dozen quarters" (and could

it be made public which quarters), and can we have it explained—and not explained away—why it was “found impossible to put in the field anything that could for a moment bear comparison with the work of Max Reinhardt”?

Yours faithfully,

GORDON CRAIG.

Villa Raggio, Rapallo, Italy.

November 14, 1919.

His comment on this to-day is:

“Twelve years ago—twelve years wasted. No replies—no enquiry—Hush! Hush! policy.”

It was recognised during those years that Gordon Craig’s School “ought” to have been re-established and that, certainly, if national finance had been in a normal and healthy state, it “ought” to have been established at public expense. But the State was not then busying itself with ideal values.

The wealthy private citizen required strong evidence of unanimity of opinion before he would find it easy to spare money for a munificent foundation.

The impresario was not yet able to appreciate the prospect of a proposal which did not involve an immediate production in a theatre.

Gordon Craig held that no great business man ever touches the Theatre except to *endow* it. He has since made a comparison between Theatre as business and Trade proper:

I only looked at reports of two of the most popular houses which occurred to me off-hand—Selfridge's and Lyons'. I had no notion whether these two would prove to be but paltry business concerns by the side of Drury Lane. I must admit I had rather a hope that they would do so, and that after all I should be entirely confounded, and that the grand old Drury Lane, though turning out stuff for the public which is unworthy both of Drury Lane and of our public, would at any rate be doing it at a terrific profit, so that at least one thing would be established—that the Theatre *could* make money.

The figures prove that the Theatre cannot make money. No business man who has respect for himself as a business man will go into Theatre business to make money for himself or for shareholders—if only for the one reason that it renders the ancient and steady tradition of great business farcical.

Enquiry shows that in 1926, Drury Lane is making a profit of £49,000, and in the same year Selfridge's a profit of £490,000. In 1927, Drury Lane is making a profit of £37,000 odd and Selfridge is making a profit of £821,000.

It amounts to this then: that business and Theatre are misfits. It is as though a boy went out with his father's large top hat on and it covered his eyes: and Drury Lane seems to be wandering about in this ridiculous plight and no steps taken to alter it. This cross between business and art is not only ridiculous, the result is pitiful. It creates as pitiful results as a cross between an Arab steed and a giraffe would do. There is a remedy for it which is, to exterminate the breed and prevent it in future; don't go crossing business and the Theatre. Let us at any rate have the pure strain of the Theatre. Though the Theatre come not

into the highest category of creation, let it be good *of its kind*. Let us be rid of this mongrel state of affairs, this under-breeding of an already under-bred species.

People have said that, as Queen of the English Theatre, Ellen Terry might easily have persuaded her large and influential following to erect a theatre. But she was differently constituted from Mary Moore, who, with Charles Wyndham, was able to build and control more than one theatre. Ellen Terry's letters to Bernard Shaw show how innocent she was of the intricacies of finance as they may be elaborated by those who set out with the prime object of making as much money as possible with a play. She makes the proposal of an artist and receives the answer of a bargain driver. She wilts before the enumeration of the clauses of a contract. One simple clause had seemed enough to her.

Ellen Terry would have liked to have been in a position to forward the movement which she was proud to have begun in supporting her son's early productions. Of course she grieved over his "rashness" in offending the stick-in-the-muds, for she herself never could have offended anybody. Ellen Terry (very wisely) would not risk losing any of the regard of those who "adored" her—although in private she may have referred to some of them as perfect idiots. She was so much "loved" by them all.

So she could not publicly uphold the "new movement", even if she had carefully analysed it as perhaps she never did. Perhaps she could not quite bring herself to take the efforts of her "little boy" (she continued to look on him so to the end) as seriously as the analysis would have required.

In 1904, she was still acting very brilliantly and had not much time for studying new movements, even if she had then had any very great desire to—or any really great motive to engender such a desire.

In 1908, she wrote in her book, "I am afraid I think as little of the future as I do of the past. The present for me". This was a plucky attitude for an actress of sixty years of age.

So she gave more years to acting in the present and to disregard of the future of the stage. She heard with pride of the growing reputation of her son abroad and of the influence of his work on the continental theatre and was sure that it would some day command recognition at home. She did not like (and neither did he) certain phases of the modernist theatre.

Gordon Craig, in cutting himself adrift from his connections with the commercial theatre, and in planning a new development, had reckoned without the war. In 1918, when he was trying to relight the fires which had been allowed to go out and finding it "a rare business", when he began to ask for his school once more, it was a

little too late for Ellen Terry to consider any new activity. She was then seventy and rather less able to say "the present for me". Her mind turned towards the future and she wondered what lay in store for the stage. She thought more about her son's aims but she had not the power to secure the patronage for the school foundation.

During the last weeks that Gordon Craig was in possession of the Arena Goldoni, he was visited by Jacques Copeau who found in it the model for the school which he is now carrying forward on the Côte d'Or. The American schools have generally benefited by Craig's demonstration to the extent of recognising that the art of the theatre is to be arrived at by a study of contributory crafts. The Laboratory Theatre, New York, is directed by one of Stanislawski's former pupils, Richard Boleslavski, who staunchly supports the work of *The Mask*, and knows how to derive instruction from its pages.

It has become a matter of general intelligence to know who Gordon Craig is and what he has done in the world of the theatre but such is the dominance of the playwright in the English dramatic world that there are still schools of dramatic art in his native land where students may take a year's course or a two years' course without once hearing his name.

To the suggestion that Mr. Craig has been rather unfairly neglected, Mr. Bernard Shaw has

replied with the exclamation, "Neglected? Why are we talking about him at such length?" Mr. Shaw is an active member of the Council of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which, since it receives a Government grant, is subject to public criticism, and he may be questioned as to whether he has done all that he might have done to secure at least an admittance of the study of Gordon Craig's work there where the study of it might have been beneficial. Mr. Shaw may not have neglected to talk about this work, but he has neglected to understand it and to forward an understanding in the national school. It is work of a character which had every right to a welcome there, and to ignore it was something worse than neglect. In an open letter to Gordon Craig, Mr. Shaw said: "In the nineteenth century they did not know what you were talking about; to-day they may not know much better; but you are the most famous theatre man in Europe." It may occur to some that Mr. Shaw might have considered it his duty to institute an enquiry into the reason why, since he knew this to be the case.

XIII

"THE MASK'S" CREED

DIFFICULTIES owing to the costs of paper and printing caused *The Mask* to suspend publication for the years 1916 and 1917.

In 1918, came the announcement of *The Marionette, a Monthly Performance*. It was not called a journal but a performance, "because a journal has a programme—lives for a cause, ideal or base—reports what's going on—suggests what would be—should be—if ideal, makes a stand against intrigue and unwise tendencies, or if base, supports them. . . . It cannot be all that—so the curtain will merely be rung up and the performance will begin."

The publication gave information drawn from many out-of-the-way sources concerning marionettes and the poets and famous people who had delighted in them. A war-time marionette of "Kultur, Culture, Cultura et Cie", a wood-cut by Gordon Craig, was the frontispiece to the twelfth number. Several unpretentious plays by him showed his understanding of the A B C of marionette art.

The Mask also appeared during 1918, as a monthly leaflet. The first of these bore the motto, "God grant we may be right for thou dost know we are determined not to give in", and the second the apt quotation from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, "We have not won our . . . battles, we have not stopped our enemies' advance, we have not marched victoriously with the modern world; but we have told silently upon the mind of the country, we have prepared currents of feeling which sap our adversaries' position when it seems gained, we have kept up our own communications with the future."

The stage of *The Marionette*, for 1919, was a single leaflet which it shared with *The Mask* which issued this message:

NEEED THE MASK make any protestations of faith this year? You know its beliefs. Do you think they will change to-day? Why should they? Nothing is more easy than to remain staunch to its Cause.

It is a Cause which, when it bears fruit, will bring a little benefit to everybody.

But as it is always being misrepresented and belittled by those curious folk who seem to want the world to stand still so that they may make a remark and ten per cent, let us once more rehearse the Creed.

¶ THE MASK BELIEVES in the Theatre and in the Drama whether written, acted, sung or spoken.



E.G.C., 1919
By Gordon Craig.

[Face page 124

¶ THE MASK BELIEVES in it all.

¶ THE MASK BELIEVES in the Actor and in the Actress.

¶ It BELIEVES in the Marionettes and in Masks.

¶ It BELIEVES in Sceneries and Musics and in Dancing, in Dancers, Musicians, Scenographers and Dramatists.

¶ BELIEVES in every blessed or cursed thing that ever was, is or shall be in the Theatre . . . if Theatrical.

¶ BELIEVES in The Theatre of Europe and in the Theatre of America. Not alone in one local Theatrical group.

¶ BELIEVES in and venerates the great Asiatic Theatre.

¶ It BELIEVES in the *FUTURE OF THE THEATRE*—not alone in the future of a phase of the London, Paris or Honolulu Theatre, but in the whole.

¶ IT LOVES AND ADORES all that can be called the Theatre.

¶ IT IS ENTRANCED by the "Theatrical". Which some day is to become the Theatrical without inverted commas.

¶ IT LOVES the dust and the rags and the paint and the daub and dirt of the Old Theatre . . . its ancient smell . . . its strange air . . . its queer ways. . . . ALL.

¶ HOW SHOULD "THE MASK" NOT LOVE IT ALL?

¶ As for those who misrepresent THE MASK, tell them from me that we know our own mother and what she expects from us, and that no one but she shall dictate to us our duty.

¶ THE THEATRE is our Mother. Its arms encircle the Globe. It is not Parochial . . . not hypocritical . . . not pathetic . . . not pious . . . not puffed up . . . starched or spotless. . . . Not a piece of Virtue without any goodness, but Human.

Its faults become ours.

Do you suppose we shall not love these faults . . . What?

Or do you suppose either that we shall tolerate them in ourselves for long. . . . What?

If our home is not quite as perfect as that of the other Muses it can be . . . and so it shall be.

Give us time to put it in better order.

Give us bricks to build the foundations of a new one.

Send no more incompetents to our aid . . . send no more advice, no more weak-kneed patrons . . . send us more solid assistance if you will . . . reliable men and enough money . . . we need both.

Help us by routing *Misrepresentation*.

¶ YOU OUR READERS AND ENCOURAGERS, nail the lies to the door of the liars. . .

The Lie that we want no Drama.

The Lie that we want nothing but Scenery.

The Lie that we despise the Actor . . . that we wish to glorify the Producer only . . . that our theories are rash innovations, are not based on the oldest and best traditions. . . . And that special fib of the fib-mongers, that we are exclusive, that we want a precious Theatre de luxe . . . nail it up.

We exclude nothing except the non-Dramatic . . . the non-Theatrical.

We include all and every form of Theatre in our Programme, we do not exclude the worst; already

we have changed some of the worst theatres into good ones.

So trace the lies up and down the cities to the house-doors of the liars and nail them there. Do that part of the work for us and we will do the rest.

¶ And say besides that it was I who asked you to do so on behalf of THE MASK and the Dramatic Genius of the World.

Gordon Craig.
1919

After that *The Mask* was silent for a few years. Gordon Craig, from 1917, had lived at Rapallo with his family, where, from 1919, he had for a neighbour Mr. Max Beerbohm, who returned to Rapallo in that year. Life here was quiet and he did much writing, still thinking of the theatre morning, mid-day and night. "I think of it as a mountaineer thinks of climbing, as a hunter thinks of his tigers, or as a sailor thinks of the sea."

The Mask had constantly addressed itself to the men of the English theatre, but its voice hardly penetrated their indifference. Claude Lovat Fraser was one who stopped, looked, and listened. He had served an apprenticeship to drawing. The

prints of Gordon Craig, Nicholson, and Crawhall were his favourite masters. From Craig he caught also the enthusiasm for the new theatre. Through a friendship with Haldane Macfall he was introduced to designing for the stage, doing first some work for Beerbohm Tree who had some thoughts of producing a play by Macfall, *The Three Students*. Lovat Fraser eagerly made some designs for its Eastern setting.

He recognised in Gordon Craig the master-mind of the theatre. Rather shyly he approached him. "I did not choose my friend Lovat Fraser. He came and put himself at my disposition. He said, I love what you love and I too would like to serve what I love, and can only do so with your friendship and permission . . . almost those words he used—'twixt earnest and jest—the state of states as the edge of the sea, 'twixt sea and land, is the place of places. No one can teach such men to act so, to move like that. Only some large inner disturbance can serve." It was refreshing to meet with such a spirit because for years the members of the professional and the amateur stage had been encouraged to assume that they were under no moral or other obligation not to pick Gordon Craig's work to pieces and use the bits as it suited them. Why not? And why not excuse themselves innocently by dismissing him as one content to dream and dispense this largesse. The ideas of Bernard Shaw are well protected by law

and watched over by the Society of Authors, but the Patent Office was not effective to protect the ideas of Gordon Craig. This accident of the state of the times explains why the socialist Shaw is a rich man in spite of his socialism, and the royalist, Gordon Craig, has often wondered where his next half-crown was coming from.

It was Lovat Fraser's dearest wish to bring Gordon Craig back into the English theatre, to make a way for him, so that his work could be seen whole and not "in pieces".

Fraser was able to try his hand with a theatrical production in a revival of *As You Like It* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. He was as yet feeling his way and the result was not very good. Whether good or bad in effect, its difference in method would still have upset the temper of Stratford-on-Avon where it was shown during the birthday festival celebrations, because the town had grown to believe that the vision of Frank Benson, who had previously been responsible for the productions, was at one with the vision of Shakespeare, and nothing else could possibly be allowed. Fraser was of a happy disposition and nothing daunted by this. When the opportunity came to him, in June, 1920, of designing for the production of *The Beggar's Opera* he invited Gordon Craig to come to England as his guest. Craig stayed with him for three weeks before the production advising him as to his

work. The guiding idea of the scene design was that it should be successively modifiable as the action required. Fraser went back to the point in theatrical history at which the stage seems to have parted from this principle in its passion to "change the scenes". From the plan of the stage of the theatre of Palladio at Vicenza he made the playful little model which is now so well known. Nigel Playfair, in his book on the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, says that Gordon Craig, who "happened" to be in London, suggested and designed the chandelier which was hung in the scene. The artist's contribution to the success was rather more than that.

Fraser arranged for the publication of Gordon Craig's books, *The Theatre Advancing* and *Scene*, and was always looking for opportunities to help on the work he most admired.

While Gordon Craig was his guest he called together, at the Art Workers' Guild, a meeting of people whom he thought should be brought into an understanding. He persuaded Bernard Shaw to attend, but not with a happy result. Mr. Shaw came only prepared to be facetious on the subject of Craig's designs. He told the company assembled how when in 1905, Reinhardt had the intention to produce his play *Caesar and Cleopatra*, it was suggested that Gordon Craig should be asked to be the designer and how he, Bernard Shaw, "being in love with Ellen Terry", had



A DESIGN FOR A PRODUCTION OF *The Beggar's Opera*, ACT I
By Gordon Craig.

Reproduced by kind permission of the owner of the original water-colour,
Mr. A. E. McVitty.

said that of course none but her son should have that privilege. He then described his feelings when he saw the designs which Craig proposed to carry out. "The first scene was to be acted behind a huge grid", said Mr. Shaw, "But I did not want my play acting behind a grid."

Gordon Craig was discreetly silent. The design which he, himself said originally, "I hardly think Bernard Shaw will like", can be seen with two others for the same play in *Towards a New Theatre*, published in 1913. They have notes to them which are as significant of his view of the theatre as anything he ever wrote, and are there for the judgment of time to decide which man best understood the nature of the art of the theatre in 1905. In them he indicates how he would deduce a sheer theatrical expression from a sheer literary one.

When Gordon Craig returned to his home in Rapallo after this, the whisper reached him that his ideals were too high and mighty for the present theatre—"They want you to come down".

"To what do they feel I could come down which would be an advantage to our theatre?" he asked. "Do you know?—their real thoughts?—for remember the enemy is very often right—because for it I would come down to the dust." Having taken up the rôle of a Pillar Saint for a purpose, he would gladly come down when that purpose was effected.

The book which appeared in the following year, *The Theatre Advancing*, contains a foreword which is an individual explanation of his attitude, and a number of essays chosen to summarise the analysis and the re-grouping of the elements of theatrical art which he had made over years of study and practice. Again there was no intention of enforcing a prescription on the workers of the theatre. The aim was still to define a standard of measurement.

In the opening group of papers in this book, he disengages the principle of the Tragic Greek Theatre from its accidental and local setting, and universalises it as the type of a *Durable Theatre*, for the performance of a drama of grave symbolism—non-natural, hieratic and monumental. Side by side with this he envisages another—not inferior, though different—a *Perishable Theatre*, a theatre of transient forms of entertainment. These complementary conceptions are allusive to the forces of conservation and improvisation which create the life of the theatre. When either is refused exercise, the art of the theatre must suffer. Gordon Craig's writing is here that of a visionary but he showed the sure grounds for his vision, the historical facts to which his allusions refer, in a letter which appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* (July 30, 1921), in reply to a doubter:

Dear Sir,—It is seldom that your ever entertaining and generally faultless critic "E.F.S."

gasps; but in reviewing my last book, *The Theatre Advancing*, he admits to one gasp.

I gather that he rather likes an essay in that book on the Shakespearean Plays, wherein I suggest that Shakespeare had collaborators and that those collaborators were the actors—but he "gasps" at the suggestion . . . he says.

Why? I rather think it may be because "E.F.S." has not inquired sufficiently about the actors of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, has not gone to the sources of information open to all students and critics; or it would seem that the many early examples of brilliant improvisation which later came to be printed (for us to read, if we like) have not appealed to "E.F.S."

When we have the authority of men such as Flaminio Scala, 1611; Andrea Perucci, 1699; Everisto Gherardi, 1717; Luigi Riccoboni, 1730; Bartilo ("Scenari Inediti"), 1880; and Scherillo, 1884, that actors did improvise whole dramas or parts of dramas or scenes long or short—it is strange to find so careful a student as "E.F.S." (and, alas, others too) asserting that it was impossible and is impossible. Each of the above authors gives one or two whole books to the subject. I mention this because to-day, if someone has written only a paragraph on some such subject, we are apt to flourish the name of the writer and to forget to add how much he wrote . . . or how little.

And we have Garrick's evidence. When Garrick, in 1763, visited Naples, the Royal Company of Comedians called on him to test their abilities in this way: "He was invited to write the outline of a plot, and they engaged to fill it up, supply dialogue, and perform the whole extempore within twenty-four hours. The feat was actually executed."

(*Life of David Garrick*, Percy Fitzgerald, 1899, page 289). Here we see that Garrick almost gasps—not at the almost impossibility of the feat, but that he had once thought it impossible.

And if Italians, why not English?

What "E.F.S." seems disturbed about is less that I should say that the actors could improvise than that they could invent such talk as that which Benedick and Beatrice and Dogberry and Verges charm us with.

But that is exactly what early Italian actors could do. We have but to read Isabella Andreini's books (1607-1727), and we see what she is capable of. Why, if she lived to-day we should all be more enthusiastic about her than, in 1841, we were about Rachel, and "E.F.S." would be writing essay after essay on the consummate art of improvisation and its essential value to the future of Drama.

By the way, Tasso writes a pretty sonnet to this lady Isabella . . . a lady whose portraits show her to have been distinguished and beautiful.

Then we can read her husband's book, the *Bravura of Capitano Spavento* (1607), then Gherardi's "plays", then Riccoboni's "Essays", and after we have again given some time and thought to the whole question we may still say we think it impossible for England, but I don't think we shall. Why should we? Recall too what the English authors of the sixteenth century wrote of the Italian actors.

Whetstone for one, in his "Heptameron," etc. (1582), when he says, referring to the practice of improvisation:

The comedians of Ravenna are not held to any written dialogue, but worked out their plays on certain grounds or principles of their own.

Again, Kyd, in his *Spanish Tragedy* (1586?).
What is it he says?

"The Italian Tragedians are so sharp of wit
That in one hour's meditation
They could perform anything in action."

Again, Middleton, in his *Spanish Gypsy* (1623)
has this:

The scenical school has been my tutor long in
Italy; there is a way which the Italians and French-
men use, that is, on a word given or some slight
plot the actors will extempore fashion out scenes
neat and witty.

Again, in Brome's *City Wit* (1632):

In that his nobility of device, it should be done
after the fashion of Italy, by ourselves, only the
plot premeditated to which our aim must tend;
marry, the speeches must be extempore.

Ben Jonson, of course, states like Sir Oracle,
that the English plays were all "premeditated
things", and not like Italian "extemporal". Of
course the English actors can be stiff; yet I think
that some of the less stiff, less pompous, more
human, were found near Shakespeare and in his
theatre—having fled from Ben—possible this.

Of the great *improvising* actors I would say that
to me they stand in something of the same relation
to the great *interpretative* actors as poets such as
Burns and Heine stand in relation to more tem-
perate, more measured poets like Rogers, like
Wordsworth—if this is not saying too much in
their praise.

And just as Burns and Heine sing because they can't help it, so do these actors act because they can't help it. . . . And you find such men even to-day . . . even in England. Why do we want to deny it?

They have something to say and act, and out it comes—after a whole lifetime of preparation . . . but it is *improvisation* for all that.

I am not going into the question as to whether Messrs. Chevalier, Robey, Petrolini, and Lauder could together invent a drama to equal *The Merchant of Venice*, because I am inclined to think that they would not claim such ability.

But that these four comedians, under certain conditions (such as training together, meeting when younger, and having a real live audience to talk to), could have contrived a glorious comedy or two or three, and that without much scribbling, is surely obvious.

That it would have sap in it, and wit, and would be free from smug intellectualism and any propaganda, is quite as obvious.

And Scarpetta, who is still living at Naples, and his father before him, have improvised since they were born, and have at last allowed their improvisations to take the form of written plays—unprinted, I believe, and never to be printed, I gather.

As for how long these English comedians might have required to get their comedies into shape—whether twenty-four hours (like the Neapolitans with Garrick) or whether a week—is surely of small importance.

Improvisation took some centuries to reach the perfection it finally arrived at—a perfection it has since lost. But it was a thing grown like a plant, and not “made” like a chair. “And an old business, too—a worn-out old trick,” says the

play-writer of to-day, who quite honestly considers his more "subtle" inventions more natural perhaps than the blossoms of the old plant.

But while it is an old affair and an old trick it is not worn out—being one of those hardy plants which will quite last the human race until the world comes to an end.

And if any student wishes immediately and with very little trouble to refresh his memory about all this "improvisation", he can do no better than go down the street to his bookseller and order Volume II of *The History of Theatrical Art*, by Dr. Karl Mantzius, in English (Duckworth), or the English translation of Maurice Sand's *History of the Harlequinade* (Martin Secker). In these books he will see *how* it was that these Italian actors could be so ready, how they prepared, what was their aim, and a lot more.

Then, if he compares what Mantzius says with some book on Hindoo dramatic technique, he may find that both of them did a little or much planning previous to their improvisations; in fact, the whole business was a serious one—just as "premeditated" as Ben Jonson claims were all written plays in England.

If the actors relied on *themselves*, and did not rely upon another (an author) to write them out what words they had to repeat, this only means that they were then not quite so dependent as they are now.

And it is *now* which is the important word. Drama is what it always was—the creative power in actors the same too—the stage, after all, very little changed. What, then, is to come out of it all *now*?

I am for liberation. I raise no red flag, except the flush of excitement to try again. But then,

neither have I joined any conspiracy against liberty, and I see no reason for worshipping a bare flag-staff, as do most of those who would have us non-committal at all costs; would have us give in rather than make an error; would prefer us to do nothing rather than push over the little toy theatre which to-day poses as representative of English dramatic art—and merely represents English humbug.

I cannot join such people; I dare no longer even be sympathetic towards them.

If any young actor, critic, or artist, wishing to change things, is at all sympathetic to the representatives of the modern stage, he will have to remain so continually for a long time; then, when he tries to move, he discovers that he is tied hand and foot to all those who are in a conspiracy to keep things back so as to feather their own nests. Then he gives in; then he goes down. One must keep clear of these people.

And all criticism which "gasps" at proposals (even should they be exaggerated proposals) to wake up the theatrical world—all criticism which in any way at all sides with the pessimists—and with the weary and with the sceptical—and more than all with the "feather-their-own-nest" people—all such criticism is cruel and ungenerous, for it shuts off all hope; it presupposes our inability to do better; it is treachery to the younger and coming theatre.

Give our theatre a chance—and yet another and still another—a chance to be itself. Do not tie it up hand and foot—gag it—shackle it—and then say: "Speak! defend yourself—you are free." That is practically what is being done to the younger and more advanced movement to-day in England.

Compare it with the same movement in other lands. I will not say they have better artists abroad, but I do say that they are treated more fairly in many lands. I suppose there must be five or six artists in England, men with ideas, and ready to put them into practice, who have no theatres of their own in which to even try these ideas. One may have *new* ideas, another may have *old* ones—but old or new no one sees them, because, out of hundreds of theatres in London and the provinces, all England and its critics are agreed that there cannot be spared six theatres for these men of ideas. No, not even three. It seems a little incredible, surely.

Does it not seem to you that a profession needs a dose of very strong criticism for a year or two to cause it to wake up and allow progress an entrance on the boards—criticism supporting youth and experiment and attacking sleepy convention?

Well, it is for this I write—for this I have given all I have to give—and have not feathered my nest—to see progress allowed full power. And all the time "E.F.S." and certain other critics, instead of calling clearly for the same thing, seemed overwhelmed. At the very least suggestion made that we might begin our progress by doing, or trying to do, that which was done at a more healthy period of our Stage they utter cries of horror, of dismay.

Their idea of progress is to sit still and oblige everyone else to. Instead of calling for renewed efforts from the stage, instead of rousing it to a realisation of its natural powers, these gentlemen sympathise with its fads and pamper its fancies, so that the stage in England is like some old *malade imaginaire*—and the doctors get no poorer, we suppose.

Of course "E.F.S." is as intolerant of me as I of him. He says: "The trouble of Mr. Craig is due to a curious recklessness," and he is quite right there . . . although it is no "trouble"; and it is because "E.F.S." thinks that our stage can be helped by anything short of recklessness that causes me to be quite intolerant of him.

"E.F.S." might have said: "The blessing of Mr. Craig is that he is so reckless, and may the stage soon have some more as reckless and as devoted," or something of that kind. That would, at any rate, have been encouraging to the invincible and helped to kill off the cripples.

Lastly, I would ask if "E.F.S." is making any enquiry to ascertain whether any improvisation is being practised to-day in England on the stage. I am of the opinion that Mr. Pélissier did something in this line; I am also of the opinion that there are quite a number of men and women carrying on Mr. Pélissier's traditions . . . some hundreds. Are they clever, stupid, brilliant—who knows?

But we ought to know—critics should tell us, and the brilliant should be encouraged, and improvisation allowed to benefit our stage.

This antithesis of free extemporisation and "the form from which there must be no departing", and the antitheses of the organic and the inorganic, of the real and the unreal, the genuine and the sham, of belief and make-believe, run throughout the collection of impressions, reveries, dialogues, letters and fantasies which form the volume *The Theatre Advancing*. It is these which have to be sorted out from the hodge-podge of

the present theatre in order to make way for the ideas of something finer. Clarity of thought must precede realisation. We may "muddle through" to victory in a European war but there is no muddling through to the art of the theatre.

It was not to be expected of specialists in other fields—in literature, in law, in engineering, in soldiering or in sailing, in tinkering or in tailoring—that an immediate appreciation of the teaching of an innovator in the art of the theatre should be shown. It *was* to be expected of the specialists of the stage. But curiously the value of Gordon Craig's work was first realised by men outside theatrical work. This has encouraged his belief in the open-mindedness of the spectator and his confidence in the public response to the old ideals, and the new theatre which incorporates these.

XIV

THEATRICAL EXHIBITIONS

GORDON CRAIG held the first one-man exhibition of his designs in London, in 1902. In the following year, he exhibited in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Liverpool. In 1904, he showed his work in Berlin and in Weimar; in 1905, again in those towns and in Dresden, Munich, Vienna and London. In 1906, he exhibited in London and in Rotterdam, the Dutch edition of *The Art of The Theatre* appearing in the same year. In 1908, he held an exhibition in Florence; in 1911, again in London and, during the following year, in London and on a large scale in the City Art Gallery, Manchester. From his School in Florence work was sent for exhibition in Zurich, Warsaw and Budapest, in 1913.

There were always doubters, especially of the theatrical profession in London, who questioned the sense of holding these exhibitions, some of whom pronounced the exhibits to be rubbish. Besides requiring some technical knowledge before they could be understood, the designs required

also a sympathy with the endeavour to find a new way of looking at an old thing. Craig's methods being outside the dominant practice of the theatre of the day, there was no other way open to him to find out who was for him. He knew who was against.

Instead of being judged always in relation to the artist's whole record—his parentage, his training as an actor, as a stage manager, his self-training as a writer, research worker and designer, and his accomplishments therein—the exhibitions were often ridiculed as the eccentricity of an unpractical dreamer. But from the many who saw the designs and models, and who read the catalogue notes, there were some few on whom the purpose dawned, quickly or slowly.

Part of the purpose of the exhibitions was to compel a revolution in the standpoint of dramatic criticism. This they have done and continue to do, in spite of the reluctance of critics to enlarge the task of dramatic criticism from a merely literary criticism to a genuine theatrical criticism.

When with the signing of the Peace Treaty there came a great rush in the formation of "Leagues", "Guilds" and "Societies" to improve the state of the theatre, Gordon Craig, who held aloof from these, wrote: "I would willingly act in any capacity on a first-class Society which would have as its sole aim the betterment of English Dramatic and Theatrical criticism, based on a

thorough knowledge of all that has been done and all that is being done in Europe and America to improve Theatrical and Dramatic Art."

The international exhibitions, which have grown from Gordon Craig's one-man shows, have spread a realisation of the fact that the drama includes but is not included by dramatic literature, and of the ideas which follow from this realisation.

From 1906, when Gordon Craig's work became known in Holland, he found good friends in that country. So it was not strange that, in 1920, he should hear from the secretary of the Society, *Kunst an het Volk* (Art for the People) telling him of the wish to organise the first International Exhibition of Theatrical Art, for January and February, 1922. The exhibition was to be held in the State Museum, Amsterdam, according to the ideas and aspirations which he had initiated, and he was asked if he would lead the work. This was a happy moment for Gordon Craig and he entered enthusiastically into the scheme. The Society and the Municipality were prepared to meet the expense of advertising all over the world and of housing, insurance, and return of the work submitted, which amounted to £1,500. Gordon Craig was invited to open the exhibition and early in December, 1921, he journeyed to the North. "I read," came a Press cutting, "that Mr. Gordon Craig is to open an International Theatre Exhibition in Amsterdam. It will be

interesting to note what headway—if any—he may make on the Dutch with his views on the art of scene painting and stage lighting.” Craig, however, had made an impression on the Dutch sixteen years earlier, they being not at all obstinate in this matter, and he now went to see how his ideas had developed all over the world.

Besides the designs which were shown, there was a section devoted to the books which had been written on the theatre during the previous twenty-five years and mainly concerned with the new ideas. It was something of a discovery to find that there were about three hundred of these volumes. They would not have been written if there had not been a call for them.

It was the hope of the promoters of the Exhibition that, once assembled, it would be in request for other nations. Mr. Craig asked for the first refusal for England. There were then few in this country who understood by what tenacity and singleness of purpose he had brought his ideas of a new theatre thus far forward in the face of a dreary opposition. This might be a moment when some bright intelligence in power in England would turn in the theatre’s favour.

Mr. Craig wrote asking the editors of *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* for their kind support for the project of transferring the Exhibition to England. This was willingly accorded. He was invited to write three special articles for

The Times. This he did and, after describing the character of the work shown, he held out his hand to the Actors' Association, with the hope that the breach caused by twenty years of misunderstanding would be bridged.

The actors, to whom, at that time, Craig was still but a vague and disturbing name, were puzzled by the situation. They had been taught to fear him as their enemy, not to look to him as a friend. They knew that they were being enslaved by the trustification of the London theatres, and they were just then holding stormy meetings on their economic position which left them no time to consider the art of their calling. Still the chairman and secretary wrote a reply to Gordon Craig, through *The Times*, in which they recognised the desirability of having a rallying point such as the exhibition would provide.

Gordon Craig looked for a welcome from the men of the English theatre, and a serious centring of effort, round a better qualified leader, if one could be found; if not, then around him. Let strength appear somewhere. This was a thing he could not force. A leader in art is only a leader by grace of his followers.

"When nations have become great," wrote Craig, "they never fail to value the two things, *Comedy* and *Tragedy*. They always have *housed* and will *house* them well—*clothe* them well—*guard* them well. History proves this—Greece, Italy, and

France, for a short time. If England is already a great land (and I thought that such was her state) then now she will make for Tragedy and for Comedy *a place*." Further:

England? . . . is in my heart but assuredly I shall not come to work in England until I am able to support myself and my family properly and with English money paid me for my work. Also I will not live and work in England unless assured that the majority of sound and steady actors are for me and understand that I have discovered, in fifteen years' exile, some little secrets useful to their work and useful to their trade. These little secrets I have in my breast pocket and I have *not* put them into writing—I give them when I am asked for them. These two conditions which I make are necessary ones . . . and I make a third to balance the first two. The third is that I must be quite sure of a small group of devoted friends in England—not at loggerheads, not jealous—capable of a realisation of more than Reinhardt's bureau were capable of (and these men were no fools and not lazy). I want men of equal understanding, ability, tenacity, AND added to that FINE MANNERS. These the Reinhardt men did not possess. Our English affair must not be like that. Therefore my staff must *choose me*. I must not choose my staff.

It was impossible that he should compromise to the extent of attempting to work with actors who had been taught to deny him owing to the curious conviction that the work of the visual artist, no matter how good, is of less value to

the theatre than the work of the writer, no matter how bad. He hoped that the evidence of the Exhibition would lift them out of that prejudice.

Mr. Martin Hardy, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, was sent, with the approval of the Board of Education, to inspect the work in Amsterdam and to report on its nature and scope. A representative from the City Art Gallery, Manchester, went on a similar mission. Many letters appeared in the Press expressing the wish that the collection might be transferred to England, but no one could see how the mighty British Empire could find the sum of £450 which was needed to cover the cost of the transference, apart from the question of housing (though this was only a third of what little Holland had found).

Gordon Craig had given too much of his time and thought to the creation of new standards in theatrical art and criticism, to have provided well for himself. He had followed his own advice, "Place the old ideal first, not last. Think solely of the work, not the pay." He was without means at this moment except for the little he could scrape together by selling occasional prints, by fulfilling casual journalistic commissions, and by giving a lecture or two. On February 7, he decided that by selling a few more prints and giving one more lecture he could get enough money to enable him to "slide back to Italy", and that he must do, disappointed, for it was not all he expected.

Then news was sent him of a letter appearing in *The Times*, signed by Lord Howard de Walden, as President of the British Drama League, holding out hope that means would yet be found. This caused him to hang on a little longer where he was.

On February 11, he asked a friend in London to arrange an informal meeting of the representatives of the Actors' Association and of the Drama League, feeling sure that if these two bodies could agree on a course of action the thing would go through.

"My position is this," he wrote. "I would like this exhibition to be in England. I am as I said, the faithful and obedient servant of the old profession. I would not refuse to take the lead but it must be clearly voiced by the authoritative people of the profession that such is their wish—till then I cannot, may not, move. Is this clear? My feeling is that they must make up their minds before asking Lord Howard de Walden's aid (he expects decision—appreciates it from a big body). My feeling is that the A.A. immediately approach the most important actors and actresses (not forgetting the Terry family—in fact definitely the old theatre families *first*—the Terrys, Broughs, Irvings, who are they?) and that these give their consent and look happy."

On February 17, he wrote to Mr. George Jean Nathan, "I am still here wasting my time and spare cash in trying to hold this International

Exhibition for England . . . as one who should tie up an Atlantic liner to a port with a piece of string. The amusing thing is that I may succeed."

A meeting was called by the Drama League and the Actors' Association representatives, and held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, on February 23, at which Lord Howard de Walden presided, when an appeal was made for a guarantee fund. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who was present, was not encouraging. He said that his experience of "picture" exhibitions usually was that he found himself in the company of the curator in an otherwise deserted gallery. Professor William Rothenstein counteracted the effect of this remark with an appeal which convinced the chairman and sufficient subscribers and a decision was arrived at that the Exhibition should be held at the Museum later in the year.

A telegram was despatched to the anxious watcher in Amsterdam. He then returned to Italy.

It was soon evident that the Theatrical Exhibition in England was to be conducted on "democratic" lines. This meant that the spark which the personality of Gordon Craig had given to the Dutch function was to be subdued. It was not from egoism that he had accepted the unquestioning leadership given him in Amsterdam. It was because he knew that the crying need of the theatre was for discrimination. He felt his enthusiasm being reduced to a dull level of apathy and

wrote: "Yes, I do allow all things to affect my moods far too much. This would not happen if I had my men and materials. As it is, I am reduced to pen and paper and that's not me. I'm stage-of-theatre-man and daily experiments, neither more nor less. I'll come over D.V., and keep quiet and still, and offend no one, and escape again and die (in due time) in some corner over here, after I have put my books and papers into rather better order than they are at present. Quite a pleasant thought this, but not all I had expected of the great place."

An appreciation of the Amsterdam Exhibition which appeared in *The English Review* recognised that Gordon Craig's doctrines were now accepted in advanced circles and were beginning to spread:

The theatre is waiting for Gordon Craig to return to active work. His theories are beginning to win through; it is for him to see that somewhere, somehow, he returns to practice. We hope that Amsterdam will be his last look backwards. We grow tired of the reiteration of what Gordon Craig did in nineteen hundred and something; we grow sceptical of what Mr. Craig will do when a perfectly equipped theatre, with efficient assistants and endowment complete is placed in his hands. Gods are sometimes born in stables, and if there is no room in the inn. . . .

But Gordon Craig knew the deception of the counsel to be content with hole-in-the-corner

conditions. The acceptance of them by a growing number of impotent little bodies allowed wealth to excuse itself from a duty which, he believed, it would willingly perform if the demand were shown to be strong. It was his belief that a big demand would meet with a big response. Capital is put at the service of things with a flare in them. To win capital from the cinema to the theatre, where it might be more healthily employed, a very strong flare is needed. Craig invited dramatic intelligence, as he still invites it, to light that flare with him. And so he replied to his critic:

If I were to take you seriously, it would be a bit of an insult to the theatre of England and to Great Britain too. For look what you propose. That the greatest Empire ever known, at the prime of its existence, should behave like a young land: like America, in 1766, was forced to behave, as Holland, in 1617, was forced to behave, and as France, in 1402, was forced to behave. You propose that a small beginning be made by me in a modest way, in some back-alley place.

Now you haven't thought of it at all clearly, or you would see that 1922 is the year, and England the place, where you propose this modest start.

I will do some things as quietly and 'umbly as possible—though not so very 'umble. I will tell you what I will do on a modest scale, in any back street—eat my lunch and dinner—live—edit a little journal—design—engrave—write books—what you will, I will tell you another thing. I have done this for many years. I have no ambition towards personal comfort on a big scale.

But for the Theatre, I have tuned my ambition up to the right key—to the standard—with my eye on the British nation as it is. Tell others about the necessity for their being this, that, and the rest—tell all the young men who need that to encourage them. But do not tell it to me, because to do so, is to laugh at the mighty Empire which when it likes, and without haste, can give me the means to do as is fitting. You call it more or less incapable of supporting a first-class theatre as such an Empire should—as some expect it to do. Do you see where you blunder?

The foremost man of the French theatre, Antoine, had done what Craig was advised to do and refused to do—he had taken a little theatre in a side street in Paris and had sought to establish the *Théâtre Libre*. He had trusted his people to support him when he showed what he could do—and they crippled him. Antione was sometimes compared with Stanislawski. But Stanislawski was a rich merchant, able to talk the language of merchants, and so he could command funds for the establishment of his theatre. Once established it could pay its way. Out of a public of millions, only two hundred thousand patrons are needed to secure a theatrical management, under present conditions. Gordon Craig refused to believe that London does not possess that number of intelligences to respond to the best that could be given. A rallying point, a centre, to which the best could be drawn was the first need.

The transferred exhibition was eventually opened, on June 2nd., by the Dutch minister in London, and was visited by thousands of people.

Many of these realised that it was not to be regarded merely as an exhibition of drawings on a wall, but as the vehicle of a unifying idea, arrayed against the old theatre of shreds and patches.

In presiding at an inaugural lecture given by Mr. Craig, under the auspices of the British Drama League, Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, c.v.o., LL.D., then the Director of the Museum, said:

It is my pleasing duty to introduce to you Mr. Gordon Craig, who has come from his far home in Rapallo to give us the stimulus and encouragement of his presence in what is after all a great international event—the opening of the First International Exhibition of Theatrical Art which has ever been held in this country.

Mr. Craig is a distinguished member of an honoured and distinguished theatrical family, the present head of which, Miss Ellen Terry, we are very glad to welcome here this afternoon. An actor himself by training and by tradition, Mr. Craig has approached the art of the theatre, that is to say the art of stage setting and décor as we have them in this Exhibition, from the point of view of the actor, with the practical outlook of the actor, almost with the conviction that the stage setting, lighting, and decoration must be, first and foremost, the background to the actor on whose power and passion the play must finally depend. He has said emphatically, with what I may call the genial ferocity which characterises him, "*I am not a scenic artist*". I am not quite

clear what we are to call him. Are we to call him a scenic inventor, an actor-artist? I don't think it matters what label is given to him. He is a pioneer in method, a great deviser of theatrical scenes. He has struck a note of severity and restraint, using bold shapes and masses in splendid design; using light and shade and colour; using colour itself not as means to painted realism but to reflect subtle modulations applied to the simplest of wide surfaces. The note which he has struck has been echoed again and again by many who have acclaimed him as a master.

Mr. Craig has said that he is not a scenic artist, and he will deny as emphatically as he can that he is a draughtsman at all, but his drawings, etchings, and woodcuts, which we are proud to have in this museum, show him to be amongst the great imaginative artists of to-day. They are, "Just designs for the theatre", he will tell you. But underneath them there is a superb power of drawing and his own romantic imagination. In every part of the Continent, Gordon Craig has been acclaimed and honoured as pioneer and the founder of a school. I can assure him that if we in England are more phlegmatic, if we wear our hearts less upon our sleeves, if we are less inclined to proclaim the warmth of our admiration than are many other people, we are deeply conscious that in the history of the art of the theatre, Mr. Craig's name will be written large and will stand as a source of pride to England. The place given to him in our Exhibition, and the invitation which he has kindly accepted to deliver the first of an important series of lectures, must be taken by him as a proof that the prophet is not without honour in his own country and that we are proud to have him here to-day.

Mr. Craig was announced to speak of the *International Theatre*. He spoke first of the steps which should lead to the rejuvenation of the theatres of all nations. He emphasized the need for a centre and for a clear ideal of purpose and method. Before building a new theatre, he advised that all the theatres that have been built hitherto should be studied by those responsible. He said that had he his school again he would especially encourage improvisation and would develop from that method the more fixed things and so pass to the durable. One of his ideals for the theatre which he built in fancy was that it should be neutral ground—a place for entertainment, high or low, a place for uniting people in sympathy not for dividing them with the discussion of debatable matters. He made it clear that though he was glad to have been an influence from afar, now after twenty-five years of propaganda of ideas, he would rather be an influence working on the spot.

But though his fame and his ideas were advancing, the theatre was not yet prepared for him.

On resuming his life in Rapallo after his visit to England, Gordon Craig wrote, "My friends in Italy write to ask me if I have had a great success in London—have I returned enriched and my way made clear for me? What can I answer? So strange that I have made myself draw and write so that draughtsmen find it possible to speak well of these things of mine, but I was



"GORDON CRAIG IN CLEVER, CONTRADICTIONARY MOOD"
 at a banquet held to inaugurate the first International Exhibition of Theatrical Art, 1922.
 Reproduced by kind permission of the artist, Mr. Max Beerbohm.

born a stage-man and this I am forbidden to practice. 'Traditions die hard,' say the folk when wanting to prove that my work ought not to come along on to the boards. The fact is that it's only the bad traditions which are such a damn long time dying—good traditions are immortal. They lose themselves often—but come back assuredly. I am bringing some back now. One could pray to be allowed to discover some more of the oldest and best traditions that at least one might die wrapt in these."

Italy was then in danger of disruption but, in November, Gordon Craig wrote home:

Suddenly—the latest news. The Fascisti have taken over the government of Italy and the great little King of Italy has acted like a King—wonderful—almost unprecedented. The ministers of the Crown brought him a paper to sign which would when signed let loose the regular army against the Fascisti. He refused to sign. The ministers resigned and the Fascisti are called in to govern.

If this does not teach the other nations how to deal each with his own, it will mean that the people of each nation are happy to be slaves under do-as-was-done-last-time governments.

This change here may cause me a good deal of personal loss for instead of 100 lire to the £1 I may come to get only 40 lire to the £1, or less.

But it will be worth it even to one who can afford it as ill as I can. Exit humbug—enter men who are serious and sincere. Incredible 1922! Here in this backwater, Rapallo, the mayor

was taken to-day and to-morrow must clear off. He has been killing us all and his district every way for years. The municipality has on it written to-day, 'Cleaned out!'

I have no idea what it will mean to outside affairs—France—England—but I know it means fresh life to Italy, in Italy. For it means not only doing away with silly ministers who thrive on false values, it means the doing away with the types who run Covent Garden Theatre—who whine in journals—who are 'very artistic'—or 'very religious' or 'very free' or very this or that. All nonsense goes through a people, this one, having let its young people be led to dare a little and through a King having acted like a royal person. To know what it feels like one must be in Italy. It's a touch or a wave of the ancient grandeur coming out of the skies.

The next day he wrote, "The Fascisti should be visiting Manchester before long since *The Manchester Guardian* gives publicity to the awful lie that the King of Italy yielded to force. He went out to meet strength since he was weary of weak ministers. And you saw what was the new leader's first order: Everyone to answer the roll-call in every office. Anyone absent to be reprimanded—absent twice, dismissed and no 'two hat' game. DISCIPLINE and TRY AGAIN and afresh. That's marvellous and Britain fears it."

So he saw order reduced from chaos—a pattern which he would like to see followed in the discipline of the theatre.

At Gordon Craig's request, the work of the

Italian-Swiss designer, Adolphe Appia, had been shown in the same room in the Exhibition gallery as his own. Craig looked on Appia as a big brother whom he had not met until both were grown up. When he published *On The Art of The Theatre*, in 1911, he was under the impression that Appia was no longer living, and he referred to him as a "shade from Italy". In 1914, he discovered that he was still alive and actually met him in his native Switzerland.

Appia, as a young man, had been privileged to work with Wagner, at Bayreuth, and while studying the conditions of operatic production in that theatre, he realised the contributory part which the scene must play in ideal performances. From the trivialities of contemporary *scenery*, he wished to revert to the architectural *Scene*, giving this a modern and individual interpretation, just as Craig, working independently, saw the anomaly of scenery and created his own expression of Scene.

Appia published a book, *La Musique et le Drame Wagnérien*, as far back as 1893. This he expanded and republished in German, as, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*, in 1899. The early date of these publications has misled critics into the supposition that Gordon Craig derived his ideas from Appia. The work of the two men shows a natural affinity but it was not Appia's force which compelled the revolution in theatrical ideas which circled the globe. Appia's style of writing could

never command popular attention and his books have remained unknown, except to a very few students. Gordon Craig introduced Appia's work to the English public which would not otherwise have been aware of it.

A year or two after the date of the exhibition, Appia was persuaded to enter the stronghold of the established conventions, the Scala Theatre at Milan, and attempted to carry out his ideas for the production of *Tristram and Iseult*. The scepticism of the theatre management made disappointment inevitable, for no genuine co-operation was given. Gordon Craig, looking on the venture from a distance, saw confirmation of his belief that the artist must be master of the stage before any good can result.¹

After being seen for six weeks at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the International Theatrical Exhibition was transferred to the City Art Gallery of Manchester, in October of the year 1922.

The persistence of the Craig "legend" was inevitably reflected in the comments with which the work was greeted from some quarters. Mr. Craig did his best to blow it away with some breezy letters to *The Manchester Guardian* in October, November, and December. To a rival producer who, in reviewing the work of the Exhibition, introduced a quibble about the practicability

¹ The death of Appia, in March of 1928, was regretfully recorded in *The Mask*.

of the height of the steps in one of Gordon Craig's models, the designer pointedly replied that he made his steps a good height—though not greater than that of some actually known to him—"so that they should not look mean."

In the last few weeks of the year, two representatives of the London theatre descended on the artist in his retreat in Rapallo and invited him to advise them in a projected production of *Macbeth*. It had often been said before, and it was said in the Press soon after, that Gordon Craig would never "do anything", that the doors of the London theatres were open to him—wider open to him than to anyone else, says Bernard Shaw still to-day—but that he would not enter. So it is important to chronicle that on this occasion, as on the occasion at His Majesty's Theatre, in 1909, the door was opened only to be shut, a trivial play being substituted for the serious one. Craig came to London all eagerness for the work but had to return in twelve days having given that time to nothing—"All thrown away. Yet not all. It has proved that even when I offer the offer of the ordinary man, I am not wanted by my blythe and cautious English friends. It might seem sad to some—it leaves me this time curiously interested and encouraged. . . . I am not disappointed in them in England for my own sake. I am sorry they prefer to fail—for unless they can spring on with me, they shall fail, assuredly."

Some correspondence appeared in *The Saturday Review*, early in 1923, in which the great desirability of giving Gordon Craig his rightful place in the English Theatre was urged. This provoked a reply, amusing in its smug complacency with the *status quo*, from a representative of the professional dramatic criticism of the time:

SIR,

As one of those who unworthily (according to a correspondent in your issue of Feb. 24) fill an occasional space in the Press with theatre comments, and without perhaps showing all the respect due, in his friends' eyes, to Mr. Gordon Craig, may I say, to put it plainly, that Mr. Craig and his well-intentioned friends get somewhat on my nerves? Mr. Craig is all very well; indeed he is undoubtedly admirable; but he is too dynamic for the London Theatre and is certainly not the kind of man we need at its head. Over here we need quite another type of man. Mr. Craig is too much on the Mussolini lines—autocratic, all for “discipline”, “obedience”, “sacrifice”, “no compromise”, “efficiency” and the rest of it. That sort of thing may be all right for Italy; but Englishmen and especially the Englishmen of the Theatre, would never put up with it. The democratic spirit has happily spread too widely throughout the stage world.

Mr. Craig is as much unlike the kind of theatre managers we are accustomed to in England, as the American critic, G. J. Nathan, whom he esteems so highly, is unlike the admirable and well-balanced critics (such as Mr. Walkley and Mr. Darlington) whom we have over here. No one could respect Mr. Craig's enthusiasm for the

theatre more than I do; but he is one of those unmanageable geniuses who stir things up and disturb established conditions in a way that such admirable actor-managers as Sir Frank Benson and Sir John Martin Harvey never do. It is such men as these who uphold so well the standard of the profession and have helped to elevate the English stage to the position it now holds. Were Mr. Craig raised, as his champions seem to consider his due, to the headship of the English theatre, I feel sure that we should see considerable changes; and I for one hold that—especially if the old Vic, with its fine Shakespearean representations can be saved—things are very well as they are.

I am etc.,
"CRITIC".

Soon after this Gordon Craig had occasion to write to a friend:

I am feeling better than I have done for four years or more . . . no eight years. It was eight years ago that a great writer wrote and gave me some praise as a writer and two days ago another fine writer in England has touched the chord. Kind words from friends who are not exactly on my stage are always sweet—but kind and wise words from men on my stage—or a stage above me—that is powerful and it touches, electrifies, heals, buoys and I spring up and dance the dance of forget and forgive on the bodies of the last eight years' enemies.

I am not conceited, I think—what would you say? But I am made more happy surely than anyone else by the praises of men of brains and heart. Now who do you think is my friend this time—and for all time, of course. (What happiness, what happiness!) I want to keep him a secret

until people begin to say, "Why — said to me that he considers Craig's '*On the Art of the Theatre*' one of the most beautiful and moving books of this time, so it must be good."

I see these men slowly coming around me . . . the poets, the essayists, engravers, painters . . . and all of them praising my small efforts, saying I do their job pretty well—and I see the whole theatrical profession turning its back—silent—too cowardly to feel generous to me.

What a situation! How it defeats what I most wanted—the theatre acknowledged as the SUN—and how can the theatre be so acknowledged, until it acknowledges me?

Strange grim fact . . . a strange thing to have a vision of it all—defeat—the stage defeating itself—letting me be defeated—all because it dare not be generous, intelligent, free, and sweet.

The friend whose appreciation prompted this letter was Mr. John Masefield who had visited the Exhibition at South Kensington. He dedicated his next play, *Mellony Holtspur*, to the producer. In commenting on this dedication, a reviewer in *The Manchester Guardian* expressed a hope that "the implied challenge" would be taken up. The dedication was of course no challenge, but in a reply of December 19, Gordon Craig showed that he who was accounted a dreamer, was very much a realist in estimating what conditions are necessary to fine achievement in the theatre. These he stated categorically expressing his readiness to come into action as soon as these necessities were provided.

In July, his book *Scene* appeared. The Preface, including a prefatory poem, was written by Mr. Masfield. The poet risked getting on "Critic's" nerves with his call for practical support for his leader:

There the work stood for England, and made mute
Our enemies who mocked us with decay;
There was a life's devotion come to fruit,
Enduring beauty keeping death at bay.

Here is the work. Who, greater than his age,
Will use the work to consecrate the stage?

He expressed a hope that "some rich man with a sense of style" would give England's son the means to use what his long toil had perfected.

The phrase "some rich man with a sense of style" pleased Mr. St. John Ervine mightily, and he quoted it frequently in his prominent columns of *The Observer* but never to advocate the cause for which Mr. Masfield originated it.

The International Theatrical Exhibition was next seen in the City Art Galleries first of Glasgow and then of Bradford. The few hundred and odd pounds which were found in hand when all the expenses had been paid might fittingly have been voted to further the work of Gordon Craig, who was then anxious to re-start *The Mask*, but this seems not to have been considered. Without any assistance *The Mask* made a welcome re-appearance in October of 1923, and gave a record of the progress which had been made. The journal

again provided Gordon Craig with a stage on which to play many parts as improviser and as scholar, and it kept up such an entertainment that it was said, "It is as easy to imagine falling asleep at one's own execution as nodding over *The Mask*." Writing to Gordon Craig of his work in the Journal, Alexander Tairoff, the director of the Kamerny Theatre, said, "In building the new theatre, you are neither building the old one nor the new one, but the real one."

Critical fears that in championing the cause of the visual artist in the theatre Mr. Craig was putting "the dramatist in danger" were an unconscionable time dying. As late as the year 1926, the critic of *The Sunday Times* wrote of Miss Sybil Thorndike's production of *Macbeth* from the standpoint of one who still believed that "Elizabethan locale was merely the matter of a placard" (a statement which is broadcast to-day in "educational" talks), with consequent doubtful reflection on the modern scenic movement; the late Sir Edmund Gosse, in reviewing the publication of Inigo Jones' designs for masques and plays on May 1, 1927, still followed the nineteenth century assumption that Ben Jonson's contribution to the art of the masque was necessarily "spiritual" and the contribution of Inigo Jones necessarily "material"—an argument which is demonstratably fallacious. Mr. St. John Ervine continued to hold that Jonson gave a well-deserved

snub to the "decorator" and succeeded in putting Inigo Jones "in his place" with his ironical line, "Painting and carpentry are the soul of the masque". But the fact is that Jonson put himself out of court.

Mr. Ernest Newman, in reviewing a novel by James Agate which dealt with the life of a musical critic, said that it seemed to him that, "Mr. Agate, in purporting to paint the portrait of a musical critic, only paints the portrait of a dramatic critic—a psychologically much simpler type—puts a score in his left hand and a gramophone record in his right, and asks us to believe it is a musical critic. Dramatic criticism has always appeared to me to be one of the easiest of the intellectual professions. Genius, of course matters a good deal here as elsewhere, but mostly only as regards the brilliance or the commonplace of the writing."

The distinguished musical critic then advanced his reasons in explaining his fancy that dramatic criticism is a comparatively soft job: "A dramatic critic, has in the ordinary observation of life, criteria roughly sufficient to enable him to say whether a play is good or bad, true to life or false. But musical criticism is a very different matter. For one thing, there is a technique of music to be studied, or rather half a dozen techniques, for every age has its own view of music and its own principles of composition. Then again, while the whole of the dramatic literature that matters very

much can be mastered in six months' hard reading, a life long time is insufficient for the study of the significant music of the world. Further, while the latest Pirandello play can be read and grasped in an hour, the latest Strauss or Schönberg score demands at least a week of solid study."

Gordon Craig, in resuming the publication of *The Mask*, in 1923, had resumed his demonstration that the range of drama is commensurate with the range of Creation with which it is correspondent and had provided the answer to such limited ideas of the function of dramatic criticism as are here expressed by Mr. Newman and are shared by those who have not faced the evidence brought forward by Craig. While the whole of the dramatic literature that matters very much may possibly be mastered, as Mr. Newman says, in six months' hard reading, the study of the dramatic *art* of the world takes longer. Dramatic literature grows out of the theatre and when it has attained its complete form, it may be questioned whether it belongs there in that form. The dramatic critic must take dramatic art and, not merely dramatic literature, as his subject.

In slowly compelling a revision of the tenets of dramatic criticism, in which more than a mere quibble as to whether scenery was to be or not to be, which in truth involved deep principles of life and art, Gordon Craig was confident that, "I have started what they cannot stop."

XV

THE ARTIST-SCHOLAR OF THE THEATRE

THOUGH he is placed in the first rank of graphic artists, drawing, designing, and printing on paper have never been anything to Gordon Craig but a means to a theatrical end and incidentally a means of earning a livelihood while filling in the stage wait occasioned by the obstinacy of the times. As the love of Jason's life was for his ship, the *Argo*, so the love of Craig's life has been the Theatre.

Nevertheless circumstances forced him during 1923 and 1924 to give a good deal of his time to surveying his achievements as a woodcutter and to the preparation and issue of his books, *Woodcuts and Some Words* and *Nothing, or the Book Plate*.

Mr. Campbell Dodgson, who from his position as Keeper of the Print Room at the British Museum, has gained an exhaustive knowledge of the history of woodcutting and engraving, wrote the preface to *Woodcuts and some Words*. Mr. Dodgson remarks on the peculiarly musical character of Gordon Craig's cuts which seem to sing to the attentive ear.

The artist found that he had to date made over five hundred woodcuts. Fifty-eight of these he reproduced in his book, with headpieces and tailpieces besides.

In 1920, he cut the block of *Lear*, from the design of which, three years later, he made a model for the theatrical section of the Exhibition at Wembley. The model enabled students to realise that the design of the woodcut, which seems two dimensional, is, in fact "a dramatic statement of half a dozen planes and a completely organic structure". "Craig's work", wrote Mr. G. P. Konody, "so far from being only partly realised, is so full of content that its significance may be in each case only fully known to the creator; and we are forced to the conclusion when we make such a comparison as this, that it is not only what Craig gives us which intrigues and delights us, but the feeling that he has much or perhaps more, still up his sleeve. He is a man who has worked a great deal on a small scale because, except occasionally, he has not had large masses of men or structures to use as his material. But this is our misfortune, not his fault."

In 1921, Craig made the cut, *Hommage à Jacques Callot*, and there he would have liked to leave this little stage for the actual theatre again. As the post-war stage was not yet ready for him, he thought of designing a set of illustrations for *Robinson Crusoe*. Four cuts which resulted from

this impulse have already been published by him and show his qualifications to be the depicter of this masterpiece. Count Kessler, who owns the famous Cranach Press of Weimar, has now commissioned a set of woodcuts for a *de luxe* edition of the story.

As far back as 1908, Craig with the encouragement of Count Kessler had contemplated producing an edition of *Hamlet*, illustrating his ideas of its stage-management with woodcuts in so far as this medium would allow. He returned to this project from time to time and worked on the designs. In the austere lines of these the drama is universalised.

In November of 1924, Gordon Craig visited Milan in order to study the activities of the *Teatro della Scala*. He was curious to learn what impression Appia's experiment had made on the management, and he also wondered if there was any safer way in which an artist could bring some influence into such a great organisation as he knew the theatre to possess. His study of the Italian theatre had led him to conclude that, by 1900, it had lost all taste—it was free from bad taste and good taste—and that was what won him to its way of putting on plays at the beginning of the century. But round about 1920, it began to acquire taste—bad taste. It became pretentious. At the Scala he found an astounding technique. The machines and machinist were faultless but the whole thing

was in vain, for the one thing he asked to see—the touch of the artist—was missing. The mechanical arm had usurped the position of Head, instead of remembering that it was only the arm. The effort was always to make the *mise-en-scène* look more like real life; it did not occur to the directors to make it look more like the art of the theatre. While he found the box in which he sat was an exquisite survival of the eighteenth century, a masterly creation of art, on the stage was a fake—a highly coloured picture postcard. He had some discussion with Scandinani, the director-in-chief, who ask him if he would like to design a production as Appia had done. Gordon Craig replied that he would like better to come to know their best stage-man, to make friends with him and study his ways, and then see if he could not tell him a few things which would help him to develop a new *mise-en-scène* which Milano would realise came from the Scala and not from outside. He pointed out that by striving to be very realistic the men achieved only the common-place, and that if they could be brought to realise that, since music is not a real speech, it should be surrounded by a scene and a *régie* which did not seem to aim at reality. The director appeared very agreeable but he did not see how it could be done, and after attending a few more performances, Gordon Craig realised that the love of the machine was so strong that he was surprised at himself for having

for a moment hoped that he might be allowed to bring in a little artistry.

At the end of the year, the artist left Rapallo, where he had lived since 1917, and made his home in San Martino d'Albaro, Genoa. The installation of his library occupied him at first. The popular belief that artists are unmethodical does not find support in this Genovese home. The unique collection of theatre books, manuscripts and other papers is most carefully arranged. Every branch of theatre work is represented in the books, which are of early and of recent date. Many volumes of the artist's own manuscript note books preserve evidence of his ceaseless thought and activity.

Gordon Craig, in creating a vision of a great theatre, a theatre commensurate with the wonders of the world and with the grandest achievements of art, frequently expresses himself with a naïve egoism. But about one aspect of his own attainments he has been peculiarly modest. Of his scholarship he has made no parade whatever. He has been content to publish historical discoveries anonymously. In conversation he never flourishes his knowledge, though he obviously takes a frank delight in learning. He seems at first to have taken to history as a solace, or as another might take to drugs, while waiting for the time when he should once more be allowed to practise stage production. In history he sought and found justification and confirmation of the

theories to which, in his early work, he gave instinctive expression.

While it has pleased and amused some of his critics to picture him wandering vaguely by the banks of the Arno, in picturesque exile, and while the provincial journalist, emulating his betters in London, has enjoyed hurling ridicule at the vapid æsthete he was supposed to be, Gordon Craig had been delving into Italian archives and had been filling in gaps in historical knowledge of the theatre and forcing a re-consideration of the interpretation given to previous knowledge.

His style of writing has always been very elusive and allusive. Sometimes he carries his elusiveness so far that no one can catch his meaning. And as his allusions are often to points of history and to personal experiences of which his readers generally are in the dark, the value is in these instances lost on all but a few. Though he has a journalistic flair, he has not acquired the journalist's constant consideration for the reader.

He is said to write "more amusingly but more vaguely about the theatre than anyone else, living or dead." The note of hesitancy in the word "vaguely" is a pity. It may be that the vagueness is in the mind of the reader, accustomed to look at theatre things from a fixed angle, and not in the mind of the writer who looks at these things from all angles and from a more precise knowledge of history. But the failure always to meet his readers



GORDON CRAIG IN HIS STUDY



HIS LIBRARY OF THEATRE BOOKS ADJOINING,
in his home in Genoa.

has wasted some of the powers he has exerted in the cause of the theatre. To this criticism he may reply that the reader must advance half-way towards meeting—"I think it is your turn to do something."

The *truth* about the theatre is what he has always aimed to set down. A passionate current of feeling runs under all that he writes so that sometimes it goes easily, sometimes it is choked. Readers lighting on a halting passage have pronounced his English to be "deplorable", taking up flowing passages others have found it "unusually rippling and pellucid." He will write in a high poetic strain, with the utmost refinement in choice of words, when on the theme of the hieratic theatre; he will use a colloquialism and the latest slang term if he finds it expressive of the truth about another theatre. He feels no need to apologise for shortcomings which have been found in his writing, since writing is not his craft. When conscious that he is not doing justice to some immense subject which he has chosen, as the subject of Irving, he will say, "But if I splutter and cannot find the right word, put it down to something that's good anyhow . . . listen how glibly one of his foes will coin phrases to his harm . . . will lie like truth."

One considerable student of the theatre, André Levinson, has written, "It is impossible for me to say how greatly I admire this prose,—now

bare and unadorned, and then again so rich and opulent—the rigour of its definitions, its easy digressions and schematic summaries, the whole based upon a science both complete and unobtrusive.”

Arnold Bennett, while admiring qualities of Craig’s writing, commented on his “imperfect grasp of grammar”. H. W. Fowler has pilloried the “’s incongruous” in “of the Theatre’s Art”, which he found in the original prospectus of *The Mask*. He condemned the avoidance of the repetition of the word “of” as being a leap “out of the frying pan”. Mr. Fowler did not know perhaps how very many times the artist had written “of the Art of the Theatre”, when he would not once allow it for the sake of “its effect as a novelty”.

Mr. Craig freely admits that, “No one has ever been able to make me understand what is an infinitive, so I don’t know when I split one”. His spelling frequently ignores modern standardisation and remains as personal as that of Sir Isaac Newton. The critic A. B. Walkley, expressed mock distress on finding the name of his favourite novelist mis-spelled as “Jane Austin”—and this in a passage purporting to imitate his own style. The errors of *The Mask* were not always to be accounted for by the fact that it was set up by Italian compositors. But Craig was less concerned not to make a little slip in grammar

or in spelling than he was to be more accurate than were his critics in ideas about the theatre. A failure to appreciate a small point in the art of writing seemed to him to be trivial beside the grand failure of some writers to understand the nature of the theatre. "After all", he wrote, on seeing some of the mistakes which the academic mind could make, "my own poor brow is not so very high and *The Mask* only one step up from the stage. *Mask* 1925 is not a bad achievement. 'Grand' it is not, I fear. But it will do. I wonder if theatre folk at all guess from this bit of a feat what I would do with a Theatre in three or four years. DOES THAT NOT OCCUR TO ONE OF THEM? Well."

With Volume XI, *The Mask* commenced the publication in handy form of magnificent plans of old cities, the first being Nolli's Plan of Roma, which shows the city as it was in 1748, every street, church, palace, academy, theatre, and almost every house being clearly indicated. Nolli's plan was followed by a reproduction of Turgot's Plan of Paris, 1734-1739, and this in the following year, 1926, by Horwood's Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark and the parts adjoining, which was first published in 1799. These plans were edited with lively notes on the theatres of the cities which showed the range of Gordon Craig's knowledge, and his power of divining a living principle in the past which seemed dead before.

The Mask of 1926 was also enlivened by an article on "The Colossus: G.B.S.", a witty indictment of Bernard Shaw for giving the theatre, "not what the artist would give us, but what a very clever man, failing to be an artist, falls back on." This drew from Mr. Shaw a reply which showed that he had not changed his attitude in view of Craig's thirty years of demonstration, but he still thought of the visual artist's work as something *added* to a written play, instead of realising it to be inherent in the conception of true drama. In fact the "dear fellow", as in Mr. Beerbohm's famous caricature, was still standing on his head and seeing this matter up-side-down.

Signor Carlo Linati has given a clear account of the impression which the art, the scholarship, and the personality of Gordon Craig have made in the country which was the centre of his studies for many years:

A decade ago in Italy one spoke of Edward Gordon Craig and of his work with a mixture of acute curiosity and of reverential fear; his bold attempts at renovating European scenography on a basis of pure poetical intuition were only known to us through the pages of some northern journal, in which alas, the discussion of them was somewhat confused. It was known that he had been *régisseur* to Stanislawski of Moscow, that he lived in Florence and had a school of acting and scenic art, but that was too mysterious. Later on when, well or ill, through recastings and arbitrary inter-

pretations, his theories found some application among us also, he began to issue some of his highly flavoured periodical sheets on the theatre, such as *The Marionette* and *The Mask*, which, together with the appearance of his two big volumes on the art of the new theatre rendered him rather more accessible to us. The shadows began to disperse around the legend of Craig, and he began to appear to us in more human garb. All the splendour of this crusade was then understood, and how he had been truly the spiritual father of all the vast scenographic renovations which found in Bakst, and in Reinhardt their most acclaimed practitioners.

And then it was that I one day had the pleasant surprise of seeing him arrive at my house.

I have never seen a more living and luminous man. Craig, who is over fifty, has a beautiful prophetic head, a shock of white hair, and the ready, gay, vivid conversation of a young poet.

That evening we dined together, and afterwards nothing would do but that I should take him to a performance of *Gerolamo*, in the little theatre of Piazza Beccaria. And there, stretched out in a *poltroncina*, laughing with delight in the midst of a public made up of children and mothers, he took a world of pleasure in listening to the buffooneries of *Gerolamo finto Principe* (Gerolamo in the guise of a Prince), and observing the form and the decorations of that minute *sala*, and making me note the jests and costumes of the marionnettes, the delicious rudimentary character of the scenes.

He had enjoyed himself on the way to the theatre, also. Milano pleased him; its streets, the tumultuous gaiety of the crowd, the vivacity of the faces seemed to him in itself an incomparable spectacle.

The evening before he had been at an operetta at the Fossati, and there also he had enjoyed himself immensely. The supreme festiveness, the spontaneity of the scenic play in our popular theatres sent him into ecstasies. And then the merry outbursts of laughter from our audiences. . . . One saw in him, in short, a happy man, happy to have finally discovered in our neighbour, in this eternal spectacle of actions and passions . . . a source of sane and perfect joy where most find only boredom and rancour.

This way of considering the world as a stage, and human activity as a comedy, is perhaps what renders the recent writings of Gordon Craig so full of festiveness, so witty, so flowing, so penetrating. Read some page of *The Mask*, some of those jesting dialogues on the actor and *mise-en-scène*, or some of his amiable dissertations upon a mask or an ancient Italian theatre, and you will find there a writer highly sensitive, pleasant, amusing, all quips and jests, at times humorous even to madness, but then erudite and precise, if circumstances demand it; as one might say a Thackeray, but more aerial and mordant. The *chat à baton rompu*, the witty dialogue, the paradoxical thrust, the *sottointeso* and irony are the instruments of which this wizard makes use to shape his strange miscellanies of delicious jest and of erudite *fumisterie*. But let us understand each other; he does not banter for amusement: one would call his the Socratic irony of one who found the world too poor for the realisation of his lofty imaginations, and who, all the same, good-humoredly adjusts himself to it even with clipped wings. It is the jest of a great navigator who, after a long description of a voyage, comes to earth, among little people whom he yet loves.

In his *Books and Theatres*, for example, there appears to us, in all his splendour and development, a Gordon Craig, second manner.

He has renounced giving us notes and fantasies of new scenic explorations and he is here in the garb of a simple *buongustaio* (man of good taste) in the matter of theatres and books, his implacable passion. It is a varied volume made up of learned and amusing gleanings and crumbs about old Italian books, booksellers and theatres.

Not that he refrains from sometimes returning to the old favourite theme of the actor and his scenic realisation, a theme already evolved by him, you will remember, and concluded with scandal, in the figure of the Actor-Supermarionnette. Here more modest, in a chapter entitled "Books and Actors," he assures us that a good actor, if he wants to become great, ought to work hard from 8.30 in the morning till 12.30; then from 2 till 6; and perform in the evening. The reason why to-day we have few good actors arises from the fact that they do not work all day, they do not study, they do not experiment, and thus do not use brain and imagination.

Weary at last of hammering and rehammering on that ineffectual nail, one fine day Gordon Craig changes his direction and sets himself to raiding Italy in search of old and curious theatre books—a gay and fertile foray, the most amusing adventures and encounters of which he relates to us. He has traversed all the cities of the Emilia, of Tuscany, of the Veneto, book-hunting; he has entered, to put it moderately, into half a hundred shops of old booksellers, he has unearthed precious volumes and folios, but above all he has acquired a superb experience of their proprietors. He traces various types of them for us. The Italian

bouquinist in general is reserved, contrary, grumpy; but there are some fine exceptions, one of whom is that bookseller, Vannini, described to us in the delicious chapter, "On Certain Booksellers", who has so subtle, so enigmatical a smile. And to each Craig fits his fine nickname: here is *Dead Pa*, a bookseller of Verona, who, behind his little stationer's shop, conceals mysterious treasures of quartos, prints and drawings; and the *Lady Eva*, nimble book-saleswoman; and the *Poorman*, a very poor bookseller; and the *Gran Mago Merlino*, a terrible man who affirms that he never has the books you are seeking for, but by dint of searching, you always find them in the end.

In spite of all this good-humoured chat, this seeker of books has a clearly defined aim; to seek out records of the Italian theatre. And how happy he is when, after a day of strenuous fatigue on step-ladders and among shelves, he has succeeded in unearthing, at the back of a dusty cupboard, the design of some old provincial theatre, or some record of a ballet of the eighteenth century, or the portrait of an unknown singer, or even a little Memorandum on the Illumination by Gas of the Theatre of 1820. How this Englishman adores our little old theatres, their history, their genial graceful architectural structures; and when he tells us that the Italians of the *settecento* and the *ottocento* were the first builders of theatres he has not the air of paying us a compliment. The *Teatro Olimpico* of Vicenza, the *Farnese* of Parma and the *Olimpico* of Sabbionetta are the three most beautiful theatres of our *settecento*. And since the other two are well known, he dedicates a long study to the theatre of Sabbionetta, commenced in 1588, on the design of Scamozzi. He describes humorously his difficult journey towards that

borgo to find at last a cinematograph in the beautiful picturesque *sala* where once upon a time the actors and jugglers of Vespasiano Gonzaga declaimed.

But, serious or jesting, there breathes from all these pages a love so keen and cordial for the old things of Italy that indeed it causes us to regret the good old days in which scholars of good taste and a little worldliness, like Biagi, rested pleasantly from the fatigues of long critical studies, in poring over some fine passage of peasant wit, some forgotten story, or a mysterious fragment. This type of travelling observer, who lent a gracious ear to the voices of the old towns and of their stones, heavy with history, has by now disappeared from among us, while he yet lives and flourishes in France and England. England has a long tradition of learned travellers. Diarist and annotator *par excellence*, the cultured Englishman rarely returns home after a long journey without having his sacksful of a goodly booty of notes and impressions. Like that traveller, John Evelyn, of whom Craig speaks at the beginning of the volume, who left London in 1643, visited Paris, then came on down to Genoa, to Siena, and stayed in Rome three months, leaving us, written in a diary, the most precise and amiable things about our country. . . . "I seem to see this fellow-countryman," says Craig, "mounted on his caparisoned ass, going upwards towards the northern mountains, perhaps thinking sorrowfully on the fine speeches of the *Umoristi* of Roma, of the noble opera of Venezia and of the lovely Milanese evenings!"

And who knows whether he would not rather have found himself, instead of in the garb of a scenographer of the twentieth century, riding side by side with that gay wandering compatriot of his

through the resorts of a quieter and more delicate Europe?

This Italian recognition of the artist-scholar is a confirmation of that given by the Minister of Fine Art, Corrado Ricci, in his book, *Figure e Figure del Mondo Teatrale*, in 1920.

Another estimate to be recorded is that of Dr. Joseph Gregor, the renowned keeper of the unique collection of theatrical treasures in the Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, who says:

Gordon Craig turns, Janus-like, in two directions. He is the most modern and the most ancient of scenic artists because he knows that the one cannot live without the other. He was the first theatre architect to discover that between the modern theatre and that of Athens and Epidauraus there is no difference and that therefore the modern scenic artist is well advised to study his forebears in the history of the art of the theatre.

In no way has Edward Gordon Craig found antiquity merely through guessing at it. He is, amongst all modern scenic artists, the first theatrical historian. There are his books which in future days will be celebrated as the best monographs of to-day. He has in *Towards a New Theatre* and in *Scene* given us also the best résumé of his own work—much better than any other monographist could have done. Above all, he has given that wholly wonderful work which is in no way dead, since it continually renews itself, the periodical, *The Mask*.

The Mask is now twenty years old—just as old as modern scenic art. From that fact it will be

seen at once that here is the first *History of Modern Scenic Art*, in the form of a magazine such as developed the spirit of the eighteenth century. *The Mask* was the first journal of theatre art in Europe and it has remained first. It has given its readers historical fact sooner than theatrical historians have produced them either in lectures or in books.

If we see aright, Craig's grandest designs—those simple but inspired abstractions from Greek Temples, the Basilicas of the Middle Ages, the Palaces of the early Renaissance—are nothing less than the renewal of history in the reborn theatre, seen through the eyes of an inspired man. The heroes of the theatre live in these spheres and Gordon Craig asks for actors who are no less than these. There is no word more abhorrent to Gordon Craig than *realism*. Even the graceful little comedy, *Venice Preserved*, he clothed with a mysterious play of light and shade and with wonders of colour.

But not only has Gordon Craig been an innovator in the art of production, as an historian he has made discoveries. It is very characteristic of the unworldliness of this master that the world-war did not stop his studies. In 1915, he pointed out the Jesuit theatre architect, Pozzo; long before, he had pointed out Serlio, from whom the whole shaping of the stage of modern times begins; he pointed to the *commedia dell'arte*, to the history of costume by Vicellio, to the masks and harlequinades of Callot and Gillot.

No time is too remote for him to bring back to the theatre, not for slavish copying, but as breathing the spirit that seeks for rebirth. It is for this reason that Edward Gordon Craig lives in the land of the greatest theatre history. He

has dedicated his best book "To the Italians" as to that people which possesses the greatest gift for acting and which has possessed the strongest theatre of all times. The chief riches of his historical examples are taken from the Italian theatre. I would like to express the wish that Edward Gordon Craig may turn to the history of the Austrian theatre—to the glowing, full-blooded baroque, the musical, dainty, glittering rococo—and may study the primeval strength of our national comedy. The living theatre will receive measureless service if this man will increase his historical examples.

His own art is not Italian; it is universal. The abstract, plain lines of his projects and scenes, with the simplest of magic formulas, impress the spectators most powerfully. His own art does not know geographical boundaries; his symbols do not know the boundaries of time.

XVI

A PRODUCTION IN THE STATE THEATRE, COPENHAGEN

FROM time to time, Gordon Craig received proposals that he should make a production in this theatre or that, accepting the ordinary prevailing conditions of a few weeks of scratch rehearsals and intractable material. But because he recognises the art of the theatre to be first the visualisation of the images of the dramatist, and because, therefore, he works primarily in the plastic material of the theatre, because, also, he believes in the principle of the autonomy of the theatre, in its duty to compose its elements into a whole and stands guardian over its right to self-determination and its dignity, he invariably replied, "If I accept these unpractical conditions, I can only make mediocre things such as you can realise for yourselves." Jacques Rouché, who offered first the Théâtre des Arts and then the Opera, Paris, admitted the truth of the reply but he and others felt that they were unable to change the conditions. The united determination of all the foremost men would have been strong enough to

effect the change. Gordon Craig had worked and hoped, quixotically perhaps, to unite them.

Writing to George Jean Nathan regarding these proposals, Craig said, "What I need is simpler and safer: 1. The money, 2. The man, 3. The time—and you shall have the goods. By money, I mean the backing of responsible moneyed men, backing not for a season or two, but as the inventor of a flying ship or a patent food gets backing—*the business put on its feet for good and all.*"

Having maintained this attitude unbrokenly since his work at the Moscow Art Theatre, in 1912, it gave something of a surprise to his friends when, in 1926, he delightedly accepted the invitation of the Danish actor, Johannes Poulsen, to collaborate with him in the production of *The Pretenders* of Ibsen at the State Theatre, Copenhagen. Craig went in response to the call of an individual, to a voice in which he heard a ring which meant that there was one who understood, and who therefore would not fail to carry through whatever he directed.

The occasion was a gala performance in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the work of the brothers Adam and Johannes Poulsen on the Danish stage. They are the leading actors of Denmark, and as the sons of Emil Poulsen, who first performed many of Ibsen's characters, they enjoy hereditary prestige.

In accepting the invitation to Copenhagen, Gordon Craig stipulated that he should have no

fee for his work. This again caused surprise. He had so frequently demanded huge sums on behalf of the theatre, for which nothing could be too much, and now he would himself accept nothing for working night and day on behalf of the production.

The explanation of this behaviour is no doubt that he regards money as a power which should be the servant of life and not be allowed to become the master and dictate. So he has given some people the impression that he cares nothing for money and others the impression of asking too much.

Craig went to Denmark with the idea of contributing only the scene of the death of the Bishop to the production, but he found Poulsen so eager in his support, and so insistent that it was Gordon Craig's work which everyone wanted to see, that he quickly took over the whole direction.

The theatre which Poulsen was able to hand over to him for the time is one of the finest in Europe. Its machinery has been brought up to date by Adolf Linnebach, a technical expert who has reconstructed many of the great continental theatres according to ideas which he first derived from Craig, to whom he has paid generous tribute saying, in an English of his own, "I should especially welcome the opportunity to work for you because at the beginning of my stage career, when I was quite a novice in this line, I used your

sensational works of theatre art which marked a new period, in order to create new things upon the stage. You are in my opinion the first reformer with regard to modern staging art; the fact that the huge evolutions in this line first of all must be traced to your publications issued since about thirty years is a well-known matter, and I was able to emphasise it repeatedly in my lectures and publications occasionally given out."

Naturally then, the stage of the theatre of Copenhagen proved to be an instrument on which the artist could play.

Though the theatre had its modern machinery, it still retained its "Joseph Harker", who after some days of experience of Gordon Craig's dynamic method, decided that he must have a few weeks' rest in the country. However he left behind him a very able son who was ready to attempt the "impossible" and to achieve what might be achieved.

True to his principle of "*one scene with a changeable face*", Craig designed a basic structure of steps for the production of the play. His genius was shown in the way in which his designs played on that base from the opening of the play, before the cathedral door, to its close at the convent gates.

Johannes Poulsen, whose call took him to Copenhagen, records his impressions of the artist in these words:

The popular European theatre was created by Molière and Louis XIV. For about two hundred years this theatre was practically immutable as regards both its inner and its outer form.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, there went to live in Italy a funny man, with long hair and a smiling face and with two curious eyes, at the same time gay, mild, and melancholy. He wore no fine clothes; he did not care for money, nor did he care very much for other material things; and what he did and what he wrote, at first sight, did not appear to be very much—a few books with his personal opinions and a few drawings, that is all. This man was Gordon Craig.

Anyone who visits the theatres of Europe to-day will notice that they have changed. The theatre of Molière has disappeared and a new theatre has grown up. And if one visits the record offices of these theatres and turns over the leaves of the big reference books containing photos of the settings, one will find that on every fourth page is shown a 'Gordon Craig' design. The changed outer form is representative of a new idea of the theatre.

There is a marvellous thing about all the great founders of new movements, about all the great minds and reformers. It is that they personally have left nothing or nearly nothing behind them—nothing but their impregnating ideas. They have not written rows upon rows of volumes, but just by throwing out into the world, like a seed-corn, a few of their thoughts, they have overthrown a whole world and have created a new one.

This is what Gordon Craig has done in the world of the theatre. And as all men of great original thought, he has had enemies who have wanted to crucify him. Also like all great teachers, he has had disciples worthy and less worthy. Some

people with much enthusiasm have seized on his ideas (as they appeared to them) and have carried them into a practical effect which was not what the originator intended. That was perhaps inevitable.

It is curious that always a nearly over-sensitive mind is necessary to conceive the new ideas, and then the hardy armoured commanders are necessary to force the way to their realisation. In every country in Europe, there have been men who have carried out ideas suggested by Gordon Craig. Not only Reinhardt and Jessner, in Germany, and Stanislavsky in Russia, but also Gemier and Copeau in France, Lindbergh in Sweden, Schanche in Norway, Johannes Poulsen in Denmark, and so on through all Europe. Only from England has he always been excluded because of the huge conservatism of the English theatre.

I have known the work of Gordon Craig for many years, but Gordon Craig himself I have only known for a few years. I find him one of the most charming and genial men that I have ever known. He is good and kind, like Hans Andersen, he is quite unselfish, like Tolstoi. He does not care a bit for money. His mind is that of a great philosopher. He can work himself to death for an idea; he can get out of his mind with rage, worse than any Italian nobleman, and after a moment he is as gentle as the blue sea on a summer's day. He is infinitely good and unable to do a single being any harm. He has a sixth sense for that which is true, genuine, and beautiful in art which is given to only a few persons in each century. As every judge of character will understand from this, the fate of such a man is as always to be utilised by others to their profit and not his. The European theatre and even the American film has had success

and earned money on his ideas while he himself has had to walk about in his old grey suit, with empty pockets. He has always, just like Socrates, been poor, but while others have filled their own little pockets, Gordon Craig has written his name in ineffaceable types on the sky of the European mind.

By confusion with another of similar name, the production of *The Pretenders*, in Copenhagen, was startlingly reported in one English newspaper as being the triumph of "Mr. E. Gordon Craig, who has been described as the greatest film impresario that England has yet produced, and who sponsored the *Armageddon*, *Zebrugge*, *Ypres*, and *Mons* films." Later, in 1929, Gordon Craig received in Italy, through the post, papers relative to the conference of an English knighthood on "Ernest Gordon Craig". He had to point out that another mistake had been made. The honour was intended for the film impresario. When the report of this knighthood was published in the Press, a clerk in the New York Library assiduously added a "Sir" to all the entries under "Craig, Edward Gordon". Gordon Craig amused himself by adding the distinction "S.E.T." after his name in order to avoid confusion. "The son of Ellen Terry", he had always been in the old Lyceum days. Such is the durable character that he has sought to give to his work that it is possible that in the far future the actress, whose art is said to have died with her,

will be remembered as "the mother of Gordon Craig". It is so that Ellen Terry is spoken of to-day in the Continental theatre.

Royal recognition came to Edward Gordon Craig in 1930, when King Christian of Denmark conferred on him the Order of the Knights of the Dannebrog, for his services to the Danish National Theatre.

While the production of *The Pretenders* was going forward, the Director received a letter from the theatre historian, Dr. Paul Alfred Merbach, who was helping to organise a German Theatre Exhibition on a very large scale, designed to illustrate the history of the theatre from the most ancient times to the present day, to be held at Magdeburg in 1927. Assuming that England had knighted its distinguished son, Merbach wrote, "I would like to get into personal touch with Sir Gordon Craig, the real creator of all those endeavours in theatrical art the effects of which still govern the German stage to-day." In addressing the "honoured Master", he said, "You have in such a vital manner shown the way for German theatrical productions that it is essential, if only for theatrical continuity, that you should be represented in our exhibition by a series of your scenic designs, characteristic both of your own manner and of the influence you exercise."

This exhibition at Magdeburg proved to be of very great interest.



A DESIGN FOR A PRODUCTION OF *Macbeth*, 1928
By Gordon Craig.

On June 26, 1928, Sir Gerald du Maurier opened an Exhibition of the designs for the production of *The Pretenders*, in London. The Oxford University Press immediately arranged for their reproduction in book form.

Dr. Allardyce Nicoll, whose historical knowledge enabled him to gauge the value which the future would place on such a set of working designs, urged, unfortunately in vain, that the proper place for the originals was the theatrical section of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

On the invitation of the Council of the Architectural Association, the designs were shown for a time in their premises, the fine Adam houses, in Bedford Square. "Why haven't we theatre artists a centre like this?" Gordon Craig asked himself when he attended to speak a few words to the students. "My work is known as doing something scenically," he said to them, "but I ought not to have to do that at all. It is you who ought to have to do it, because scenic things in the theatre are really a branch of architecture." The records reproduced in *The Mask* show the truth of this, though there are still bewildered reviewers who suppose that some of its technical plates have only a "mathematical" interest!

The Exhibition of *The Pretenders* designs was seen by Mr. George Tyler, the American theatre manager. Mr. Tyler was planning a performance of *Macbeth* for the following autumn, and he asked

Gordon Craig if he would design the production. The artist again had to insist that it is only by accident that he is known as a designer of scenes. The title which he is proud to claim is that of stage-manager, or stage-director. For a large part of his life he has been like a conductor without an orchestra to direct; that again has been "our misfortune, not his fault". Mr. Tyler soon understood this, but as he had already made many engagements for his enterprise he was not in a position to give Gordon Craig the full direction and a free hand. Nevertheless, the artist agreed to make designs and to give suggestions to the actual producer, Douglas Ross.

The initials "P.B." (Pot-Boiler) which appear after those of "E.G.C." on the drawings indicate the designer's conviction that this is not the way to work for the theatre. But the evidence of dramatic sense in these designs promises that though Shakespeare may spell ruin to managers who show no skill in the way in which they put his plays before the public, he may spell immediate prosperity when an artist of vision is permitted to show a vivid re-creation.

Shakespearean acting which would harmonise with his own Shakespearean scene seems to have been vouchsafed him in a performance by the leading lady of the Royal Theatre of Denmark which he commemorated as a lover, on bended knees, not as a conventional dramatic critic:

I write this in the dust, positively in the good dust and with the end of my stick, for it is the best place in which and on which to put down in briefest words the sincerest thoughts of mankind.

I write only her name in capital letters, so—

BODIL IPSEN

The name must stand for the whole of my tribute.

For I cannot write to her saying, "Thank you, dear Bodil Ipsen, for a glimpse of Rosalind—the only glimpse I ever had of her——"

I cannot write, "Thank you for a lesson showing how an actress can use the hands, use them all the time and never make the same move twice, and the voice and never sound quite the same two chords in succession."

And I cannot, may not, write, "Dear, darling Bodil, I love you over and over again. I love you with my heart's heart. I love the perfection of your face and figure, the perfection of your voice and motion, and the perfection of your taste."

I cannot write this to her. And so it is not to you, Bodil, that I address myself but to the grace of God in you which does indeed pass all understanding when it descends on earth and enters for some hours into a writer, a painter, an architect, a musician, or an actress. It was in you the other evening when I watched you in *As You Like It*. You, and you only, spoke as Shakespeare meant, felt, thought, and hoped you would. None other but Ellen Terry have I heard speak Shakespeare so. She spoke it perfectly and you do too. Never are you forced, never exaggerated, never over-inspired

or under-inspired. All was like the sunset light which was so beautifully poured onto the scene. You burned a steady flame.

You see, dear reader, I cannot write that to Miss Ipsen. Yet I would write far more than that. I would tell her that this glimpse of the old grandeur of the comedians craft has revived in me a belief in that craft which I was losing through the sight of so much forced and ugly European acting and that she has made me young again.

And so I would do more than write. I would sing and dance or somehow express, as a fellow-artist, how much I love . . . THAT. But even so I could not express the depth of my feeling. How express that except slowly and with deliberation?

So with a stick I trace her name in the dust of this great earth . . . *BODIL IPSEN*.

Yes, round it I can draw a laurel branch—and place pebbles round it too—and sit and watch the inscription and know it to be grander than any carved in marble to some forgotten Cæsar. It is grander since she is lovelier—an artist—a flute through which Shakespeare's melodies came to us over the centuries, clear, authentic, perfect.

Even women are agreed to praise her.

Gordon Craig's emergence from a retirement that had become almost legendary and his active participation in the production at the State Theatre, Copenhagen, could not fail to effect a change in his mood. Had it not been for the invitation of Johannes Poulsen he might have been happy to continue on his way, living the life of a hermit and philosopher. Once more having trodden the

boards, however, and his ancestral memories having been vividly stirred, he could no longer rest in reflection. But as it was difficult to find a fitting place for the exceptional talents of "Lawrence of Arabia" in post-war Europe, so it has been hard to effect the entrance of Gordon Craig into the direction of a London theatre. Those to whom "the Terry temperament" is an exasperation and not a charm say impatiently, there is only one difficulty in the way and that can be stated in two words, "Mr. Craig." Be that as it may, the body of his accomplished work shows such intelligence, patience, balance and judgement that the reflection of posterity will be on the age if it fails to meet that difficulty with understanding. If there are moments when he mistakes the erratic temperament for the artistic temperament (to which it may be allied but of which it is not an inevitable accompaniment, as some great examples have proved) and if he occasionally on this ground claims a licence for some unjustifiable vagary, there have been long years in which he has practised the discipline of mind and temper which he has preached. The problem which he presents should not baffle the theatre. Temperamentally he is the companion of Kean (the wild one, not the tame one). When he gets onto a stage, he is a dynamo, as Kean was. That is what the stage is for (when it can find it) though for the moment it seems to have forgot the truth.

Some of the attitudes which he adopted deliberately in sustaining his strike on behalf of the dramatic genius of the world, for its right to the conditions proper to it, have grown to be scarcely distinguishable from his native character. He is like the Chinese philosopher to whom reality and dream were equally vivid, causing him to ask, "Was I then a man dreaming I was a butterfly or am I now a butterfly dreaming I am a man?" Some of his fantasies make it difficult for him to gauge after-the-war London and to understand its code. His romanticism leads him to suppose that London will concede the artist his own conditions on recognition that he is "a man of ideas". London will concede terms to a Patti, a Kreisler, or a Chaliapine when they have become obviously "a paying proposition". It leaves the artist to calculate his steps and win through to that position if he can. If he fails, it is indifferent. Gordon Craig is not always so certain in the playing of his cards as many a lesser artist in this game. He has not always known what his cards were—perhaps just because he is a better artist.

He has always insisted that the rôles of business man and artist are complementary and in no degree to be confounded. He points to the association of Molière and La Grange as an ideal example of collaboration and to the latter-day association of Max Reinhardt and his brother, of Stanislawski and Dantchencho. But since he has not met his

own ideal associate it would perhaps be better for him to take a less rigid view of the line of demarcation between the provinces, were he able to do so. He has said that the artist is "destined to be a rare trouble to his friends", and his own sublime way of expecting business procedure to accommodate itself to him has been a large source of the difficulty. If he had taken his ideal from the example of Shakespeare, who is held to have combined art and business successfully, possibly he would have attained his theatre sooner. But it must be admitted that the business of theatre management in 1600 was a simple matter, while for the artist of to-day it is a very complicated one.

The Irish writer, James Stephens, has said wisely to Gordon Craig, "It doesn't matter if you never get a theatre." What matters is that he should not change his path, should never sound a retreat, should keep his colours flying, and that his work should continue to exert the attraction of an ideal.

It grieves him to see men who are not artists sailing under his colours and deceiving the impresario who in turn deceives the public. They are led to believe that a true ship is coming into port and let it in because of the flag or a label.

"Why didn't we do it twenty-five years ago?" asks the impresario in announcing his conversion to the belief that "the theatre will be reborn in the new technique."

It is in the part of the impresario to raise anticipations, but he need not then disappoint them by presenting just what we were familiar with and grew tired of twenty-five years ago.

In one of Gordon Craig's most brilliant dialogues he begs the Theatrical Manager to study the difference between the different types of men the world calls "artists", to sort them out and, avoiding the commercial fellows, search for the "mad" artist and then to hazard all on this *surety*:

. . . I expect to see these two types of man, artist and business man, combine and place good things before the public instead of worthless things. In many instances good things are already before the public; but in the branch of public service in which we are engaged you must agree with me (knowing what you know) that the public is cheated.

MANAGER. But art doesn't pay in this branch of the service.

ARTIST. Again you make the ancient excuse. Art pays no worse, no better than anything else *if you know how to make it pay*; so I fail to see what other excuse you can make for not serving the public honestly and letting the band strike up at once.

MANAGER. Do you insinuate that I cheat the public?

ARTIST. No—I say it openly.

MANAGER. I give them what they demand.

ARTIST. Another excuse—the same one that I've heard for years. Why can't you invent some more

reliable answers than "It doesn't pay" and "I give the public what it demands?" You probably think that what you are saying is true, but still that does not alter the fact that what you are saying is false.

It is false in many ways. You should know quite well that the Public is so vast, is composed of so many classes and types, its taste varying with each type, that it is sheer lunacy to assert that there is no public for works of art. It is as much as to say that the public is incapable of appreciation. If this were so, you would have to explain how it is that the public knows the difference between a good loaf of bread and a bad one or explain how it is that the public can discern a good day from a rainy day—how it knows a good song and a good horse from a bad song and horse. Realise that the public knows everything that is good from everything that is bad; in fact the public is as right as rain; let us hear no more criticisms of it. If you choose to criticise *a small section of the public*, that is another matter, especially if you choose that small section which grumbles at the nation's best soldiers, sailors, statesmen, judges, doctors, priests and artists. Yet, far from criticising this section, *it is the very section you deliberately cater for in the theatre*, for those who form it are always tired after a day's grumbling and need amusement of the dullest kind. And you call that handful of the nation "the Public". Pouff.

CONCLUSION

XVII

THE RATIONALIST AND THE INTUITIVE ARTIST

IN September of 1929, Mr. Bernard Shaw, hearing that Gordon Craig was preparing a book on Henry Irving with sundry references to himself, hastened to write some fatherly, not to say grandfatherly, advice to the younger man whom he held to be handicapped for his task by his lack of knowledge of acting.

To this Mr. Craig replied with grave courtesy, "It is very kind of you to suggest something to me about my book on Irving; but the book was finished a week ago, and I have barely touched on your relationship with him, for so far as I know, there was very little relationship." A series of articles from this work appeared in *The Times* in the same month and their reception gave the author something of the sensation of a "first night". The publication of the volume, *Henry Irving*, in October, 1930, reminded a yet wider public of the line whence Gordon Craig had descended, and showed him to be a man with acting in his blood.

The "quarrel" with Mr. Shaw which the "sundry references" in this book emphasised, is

of course based on their radical differences in dramatic principle. The rationalist and the intuitive artist have been antagonists and have instigated one another since first their fundamental opposition became evident in ancient Greece.

Because of his comedic sense, Mr. Shaw has been likened to Aristophanes. But Mr. Shaw is a rationalist. Aristophanes was the enemy of rationalism, a conservative and an aristocrat, the champion of the inspirational artist and of intuitive wisdom, of all that Mr. Shaw mocks at, of all that Gordon Craig has stood for in this age. It was the foreboding that rationalism would undermine the theatre, and the nation in which the theatre was a central influence, that made Aristophanes devote his powers to ridiculing its pretensions.

Gordon Craig's attacks on the theatre of problems and preachings, however tricked out to catch the eye and the ear, "cursed sermons in jam", spring from a belief that such a theatre is *inferior* to what might be. He is also fighting for the freedom of the actor from the dominance of the writer who gives his first allegiance to the principles of writing and not to the laws of the theatre. He criticises Mr. Shaw's stage directions, not only for their inclusion in the script of his plays (which Mr. Shaw and his friends say needs no defence) but for their quality. Taking his standard of what is highest from the evidence of the past as well as from his native sense, he believes

that what Mr. Shaw prescribes is inferior to that which a creative actor, if left to exercise his sense of the theatre, would do. He is aware that under a condition of freedom the intuitive power of the actor may triumph again as it triumphed in the past—"We know our own mother and what she expects from us . . . no one but she shall dictate to us our duty." He claims, on behalf of the actor-dramatist, the right to derive from the written play an "acting version".

This right was claimed, in the early part of the sixteenth century, by Angelo Beolco, the founder of the great traditions of the Italian Comedy of Art. This actor, who was known in the theatre as *il Ruzzante*, 'the quick of wit', trained a company on a principle of which he was deeply convinced. He would take plays which had been developed into a full literary form and would reduce them to a plot and then recreate an entertainment on the theme according to fancy and circumstance and the peculiar conditions of the stage. Stepping before his public, in fantastic costume, he would say:

Let us amuse ourselves a little. Is there any one amongst you who knows who I am? You have the air of wishing to reply that I am Mercury, or the reciter of arguments from comedies. No, you will never guess it. I won't leave you in doubt any longer. I am an elfin spirit. Do you know why I show myself? Why I permit you to see me?

Do you know whence I come? From the other world; and I will tell you why. One of those who is there, called Accius by some and Plautus by others, has sent me to tell you that since a comedy is to be played this evening, you are not to blame me if it is not in Latin and in verse and in beautiful language, because if he were to-day among the living he would not write comedies in any other style than that of this which you are about to witness. He begs you not to judge by this one those which he left written; for he swears to you by Hercules and Apollo that they were recited in other days in terms very different from those which you see printed now, for the very good reason that many things which look well on paper look ill upon the stage.

As Dante and Boccaccio had written in the living language of the people and not in the dead language of scholasticism, so this maker of plays sought living expression, not dead repetition, in the theatre.

In this he was followed by a succession of actor-dramatists who postponed the polishing and publishing of the new plays thus evolved from an old theme until such time as they should have retired from the theatre. So long as the ideas were acting material they were the property of the actors to treat in their own way. Shakespeare accepted this condition uncomplainingly. His creation, Hamlet, does not confound the artless gags of the clowns, whom he would suppress, with the art of the skilled improvisers and spontaneous artists whom he emulates.

When Mr. Shaw wrote of Irving's way of "using other men's plays as a frame-work for his own creations" as being "an original policy, and an intensely interesting one from a critical point of view", he evidently was unaware of the fact that this method had a long and "intensely interesting" history. It was not an "original policy" but a time-honoured tradition.

Irving was accused of looking at the stage only from the point of view of the actor. He would not have been the artist he was if he had looked at it in any other way. He was of *il Ruzzante's* lineage. He encouraged *drama* but not Bernard Shaw (since Bernard Shaw, as writer, would not accept the creed, that the theatre alone should dictate what the art of the theatre should be). What though some of the scenarios which Irving chose did not make good reading? On the stage, as treated by him, they made a finer *drama* than has since been seen in the English theatre.

Irving was urged to produce *The Pretenders* of Ibsen because it was felt that the part of the Bishop was one suited to his genius. If he had done so, he would no doubt have reduced the writing to a scenario, a sequence of situations, and would then have taken back as much dialogue as suited his purpose as an artist of the theatre. This was the method by which he made an unforgettable drama from many a script. This was the method of the great acting companies of the

past—the method of the creative actors who once held the attention of Europe. It is a method to which Ibsen, on occasion, gave sanction, and the method which E.G.C. proposed to apply to the plays of G.B.S.

Though Mr. Shaw prescribed what Ellen Terry and Henry Irving should do in the play of *The Man of Destiny* which was submitted to the Lyceum management, he says to-day that his stage directions are really for the assistance of readers who read his plays, as they read a novel, and for the guidance of “desperate little bands of enthusiasts, mostly very poor” who keep them alive by performing them in out-of-the-way valleys and villages.

This may be literary art and socialism, but it does not assist in establishing the highest dramatic standard.

Gordon Craig, whose concern is with the divination and the definition of the laws of the theatre, asks, What is best? Villages desperately struggling to carry out Mr. Shaw’s prescriptions answer only for themselves. This form of teaching may be best for them. But, as has been said, it is on record that one of the highest contributions to theatrical art was made by professional actors who took a dramatic theme and kept it “alive” by never acting it twice alike—never letting it degenerate into a dead repetition as academic actors, reciting from a written play and following

prescribed directions were found to do. These actors made themselves vehicles for a higher dramatic illumination than is known to the rational player. Their spectators were held in suspense as to what they would say and do next. There was no knowing. In acting from intuition, subject to the laws of their own craft and of no other, they set a standard which cannot be ignored by those who would lead the theatre to the fulfilment of its destiny.

It is Gordon Craig's belief that the Drama stole out of the actors of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries as a perfume comes from rosemary when you crush it in the hand or tread upon it.

Acting and Drama were and are indivisible. When created as actors create it, Drama may be genuine and perfect. There is then no fitting of an actor into a part, no fitting of a part onto an actor—the play and the playing are one at birth, for one person creates the two and that one is the actor.

In turning over the records of the creative actors, he is continually struck by the quantity of ideas which they have still to pass along to actors of to-day and to-morrow. We can develop the material if we will, for it's there right enough.

The material is not soft—it won't spoil. But to make it soft, prepare it for a soft public, would be to waste it. Keep it hard and good and offer

it to *the* public; the only public in England worth a fig—that is to say to the common people and their friends.

These actors of the Italian comedy had a good rule by which they worked. It can be put into a sentence. They said, "Do the old trick, but do it differently."

In criticism of the acting of to-day, Gordon Craig, putting it politely, says,

If a fault can be found in the modern English actor, it is that he does not explain, does not express; he fails to express. He fears to repeat nowadays. The old actors came back and back to a thing they wished to make clear.

The modern actor is inclined to slur. If he wishes to express jealousy, he will express it over and over again by one note: Jealous, Jealous, Jealous—he strums on the piano with one finger.

The old actor would repeat six to ten to thirty times in as many different tones and gestures the one thought and so at last we began to see the idea building itself up in front of us. Construction is what actors knew more of then than they do to-day.

In doing as they did, they followed a very old tradition.

Where the masters succeed, is in that they will take no chances of failure. A master will be always expressing, clearly, or to some people confusedly, one way or another way, every way, and will repeat and again and again repeat in twenty different ways, the thing he sets out to tell us.

Take the passage in Book II, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, where the boy, Phaeton, asks his father, Apollo, to grant him his wish to drive the steeds

and chariot of the sun. Then see how Ovid, as Apollo, pleads not once, twice, but many times—for he is the actor and Apollo his rôle—and failing to turn the boy, then describes the catastrophe. See how again and again he relates the details, one on top of another, each *one* enough, it would be supposed, to express his thought. But no—he must add and add; for it is not anything trifling he wishes to say like, “Hullo, Phillips. How are you?” It is almost the great catastrophe, almost the annihilation of creation he has to swerve near.

And what but something near this is in *King Lear*, in *Oedipus*, in nearly all the great tragedies? So that packed to the brim with grief and pain, the creation for us does seem to totter during the course of reading.

And it is because the modern actor shirks the thing, trembles to scale this toppling ruin, fears to pile Pelion upon Ossa, that he can never raise the structure high enough, or reveal it huge enough, for the full purpose of Dramatic art . . . and so when to-day we have Theatricals, they stand bare and trivial beside the old Dramatic art.

It would seem essential that before a great Tragedian can establish himself in England, he must be laughed at—for it is essential that he should exaggerate furiously . . . be packed full of mannerisms: for we must needs call his “mannerisms” that which is his alone and strange to us. (Oh, I know all about your Moscow Art Theatre . . . that’s the perfection of the *familiar*. Instead of the tragic, they give you the worried: a vast difference.)

As we are an eccentric nation, our chief actors needs must be to us the very essence of eccentricity. Were we a saner race, it could be otherwise . . . like the Russians, for example. We reveal all

the madman's ignorance of his state when we cry down the very least sign of eccentricity in our actors. Rather we should hail these as long-looked-for signs of the coming men.

Something like this must be in the minds of those critics who find the art of the circus clown so admirable. The circus clown with his joke to perform, his point to be made to a circle of people, diverse and dull, who sit around him—his method is not very unlike Ovid's.

He pushes the first point home with the mallet of his craft. Quickly, he pushes it in once more; a third time he rams it into us . . . big pauses between. Is the point home? Yes. He has made sure of this. And now by a slight turn he proves this. By a gentle twist, he causes the whole circle of spectators to utter a cry, resembling pain, but really of pleasure.

I appeal for more and more appreciation by actors of the values of exaggeration and less disdain for emphasis and fury in the actor so that our Theatrical Art becomes stronger where now it lacks strength . . . in tragedy . . . in our immense and priceless English drama.

Whether it is possible for our young actors to attain this breadth while forced to perform the modern cramping dramas—dramas which are mildly and safely popular—is a question I cannot answer, though I feel that they can do no such thing.

But our clowns have breadth—our actors of broad farce have it—and I think it is from these that the theatre to come can look to draw its representative actors of the new generation . . . if we are going to have some.

Gordon Craig's own descent from the improvising comedians and creative actors is evident in

a soliloquy, from the pages of *The Mask*, which has the accent of the fragments collected in their records:

Hamlet told the actors at Elsinore that they should take heed of the censure of the one rather than the plaudits of the many, but if Hamlet had been an actor I very much doubt if he would have taken much heed of him. For the censorious one has such an awkward way of selecting the wrong time and place for his cruel kindness.

If an actor has time to suffer quietly and recover at home after a dressing down administered by "the which one", well and good; but if he has no time allowed him, if the which one gives it him in front of three thousand spectators then (if I am to be an actor) the idiotic plaudits of the many for my money. I consider the other fellow a blighter.

How I came to be so critical of myself—for I am the censorious which one—I will tell you.

I was supposing myself to be a rather clever clown (one of those quiet philosophical, not unintellectual clowns), and I supposed myself repeating for the tenth or hundredth time my quiet quirks from the little raised stage which runs in front of my booth.

I was getting along rather well when I caught sight of "the which one". That *rara avis* was an unusual looking man. He had stopped as he walked, brushing the outer edge of the crowd of about thirty spectators, and he had turned towards my platform, and it seemed to me that he showed signs of approval. I mean that he had stopped short and he was *listening* . . . it was something.

He had a broad well-shaped forehead, calm

and lively eyes, a well-shaped mouth and firm chin. I noted all this as I went on with my patter. . . . I went on with it without at all interfering with my speculation as to who this one could be. I guessed him a writer, perhaps a writer on science, yet he had the kindly look of a musician. Perhaps I thought of musicians because I was telling the spectators that love could be but a silly sort of thing if it could feed on music . . . it probably was this which put me in mind of musicians, for the notion only lasted a moment and when I next looked in his direction the kindness had gone: he now had the severe look of a doctor, as of one about to operate.

Then he cut. I did not cry out but I felt I had winced. His expression said, "No good". He then turned and disappeared, and I never saw him again.

He was the only one that had turned away. At the moment he turned, I said something about beer so as to try and hold him and the crowd had roared with spluttering joy. Their gurgling was agony to me—it seemed to be my own cry, mirthless and terrible. It made me feel sick and faint. I finished the show somehow and counted up my money in my tent. I heard the everlasting sound of feet that crunched, slipped, plodded, or toddled by outside and the cries of rival showmen announcing new lions. I was thinking only of this one face which had been so cruel . . . "the which one".

I came at last, but only after an hour and a quarter of pain, to tell myself that anyhow he was unaware that I had noticed his coming, his pausing, and his going, and that his censure had been quite unintentional—not intended to stab me. But to arrive at even this vague and flimsy bit of hope

I had to pass through a most wretched time—one of the most miserable hours in my life.

I think he will never know that I had read the expression of his face which said, "The verdict is—no go."

After this experience, how am I to be expected to gush over Shakespeare's and Hamlet's advice to the players? I think it is fatal advice. For ever since the day when *the which one* stopped before my show, I have lost courage and in a week from now I am to retire: *I am a failure as an actor.*

It's easy enough for you who read those seven words to keep up your spirits, for you are ignorant of what they mean. I assure you, it is misery to me to write them. For I was a man of talent. I was slowly developing that talent; all was, I can say, going strong, until he came, the which one whose censure I am to allow to overweigh the good opinion of the thousand jackasses who have in the last eleven years always found my work good.

I don't blame them, though I know they were perfect fools to deceive me—to laugh at nothing, to clap their hands, and, what is worse, to waste their money on me.

The censure of "the which one" is all right, laddy, but don't you take any notice of it.

I was supposing myself a clown when this occurred to me, and I merely a critic.

The warning against the criticism of the rationalist is often repeated in Gordon Craig's writings, but gratitude for the real criticism of fellow artists is never forgotten:

Arthur Symons was, with Max Beerbohm, one of the very earliest English men of intellect to

discover that I could produce certain operaballets rather prettily, and said so in the periodicals and books for which he wrote. At the time no one was more surprised and no one more delighted.

There was Nevinson too and Yeats; but for every dozen who took literature and painting seriously there was but one who thought the stage as worthy of any of their consideration.

Praise from the old professional gang of critics is good fun but perhaps it does some sort of harm if one is not developed. But from men of brains and taste and entire independence it assuredly does good. It did me good. I breathed more easily. I walked London with more assurance. I delighted more in my work. I have always loved to be at my work, but, after Symons and Beerbohm had said it would do for a start, I was ready to work twice as long.

Many other men have, I believe, a proper disdain for what may be said about their work. Perhaps they know it is good. I was never able to do more than hope it would be better and it is only when someone of brains says it is good that I, too, say for a moment that I know that.

People have often thought this was a pose. It isn't. It has all along been far too painful for that. I think I was born with a distrust and a lack of confidence in myself and I think the conditions of London life developed this mightily.

To-day I hear, that since Ibsen I have been the greatest influence in the theatre of Europe—that I am, in short, someone. I have no such delusion. I could have been a useful asset to our English Theatre because everything conspired to that end . . . everything except the bad fairy,

whoever she may be, who was forgotten at the christening.

She is a curious beast, this bad fairy. She too often is allowed to prevent England from possessing a thousand useful things.

But to me she did a great service. Her well-laid plans to do me an ill turn saved me from having to be that most wretched of beings, a theatrical manager, in a dreary atmosphere, surrounded by those unhappy people of "the profession".

Her incantations were that frogs and snails and fogs and the rest should assail me. And lo, as I stood expecting the end of the world, Symons and Beerbohm, and five or six more, worked a better magic, and I was given the key to enter other lands where fogs and witches and curses and malice are not allowed power or even pretensions.

While speaking of criticism, I must not forget the sharp corrective things which now and then appeared and were by no means malicious or unjust, but are distinctly sharp.

There was one I received from a paper, now dead, called *The Londoner*. At the time I did not like it, but it made me pause. I can imagine it is just what I needed and, re-reading it now, I see that it had a certain authority in its tone. Who wrote it, I have never learned. I did not enquire, but I would not mind knowing now. I wonder if the unknown writer thinks I have done as he urged me to do . . . and whether he has any more advice to give, to a student of his, that is equally useful, for I'd like to hear it.

Intellectual honesty in the theatre, and not sophistical jugglery, is what he welcomes. In

Therapy, therapy, the only way
into the front that (you are) do want advocating first
school of logic and you ask

Observe it - I have seen it before
Grant this - this recognition. Just face:

Remember their united approval of the same
Pleading of proposed method

What is in short a new theatre based in the old
is achieved by a group of men
it would be able to train
theaters under me without
thinking difficulties.

Unless we ask people to stop to accept
a vague ideal

I often say as ideal my fixed purpose
Sincerity of purpose.
Tends a new theatre

NO we can create a new theatre

but we may get towards one -
the method. Discipline.

Exercise of our small a large forms

Quarantining of our sleepy forms as

position of our dead ones

In America there is a rare few

In other lands where someone who
are in no need of being convinced
since they are already convinced.

But the explanation are
concerned with -

Immediate advocating

Immediate announcement

of the spirit of my followers
of their willingness to do
what I want done -

Don't write me now -
let me hear from you -
at length if you do
not see what I mean

Don't respond -
I'm busy hand
I don't have hands
I put it to grasp quickly

of this kind of answer
after a series of strategy.

admiration of Irving's business manager, Bram Stoker, he says:

But this too was a man of character, this Irishman, who, as a young student at Trinity College, Dublin, had seen and appreciated the great Barry Sullivan—appreciated him enough to be jealous when Irving came to the capital of Ireland, jealous lest the new-comer should overthrow his friend and countryman, Sullivan—as he did.

But Stoker was a man of feeling, of understanding, and of integrity. He could tell chalk from cheese, and was too real a being—a good Irish being—to care to argue against the angels. Seeing that Irving was a man of the highest genius, he did not make himself ridiculous by upholding Barry Sullivan as something better, for he could see at a glance that nothing was or could be better than Irving.

There is a veiled allusion in this to another Irishman, G.B.S., who had attempted to argue with him “against the angels” and to brow-beat him into doubting his own power to estimate Irving without the comparative standard of a living memory of Barry Sullivan.

Those who have been most eager in their championship of the “talkie” theatre of Mr. Shaw, as against the traditions which Gordon Craig proposes to restore and the new Theatre which he would bring into being, have lately relented so far as to ask, why should there not be room for both in Theatre Street, peaceably, side by side?

This is not the attitude which Mr. Shaw adopted towards the theatre which he found when he entered the field. He has recently boasted that he was the "implacable enemy" of Irving's theatre and that he did his best to bring it to conviction of sin and to salvation. He felt that it barred the way to the theatre for which he wanted all the attention—the theatre of sociological propaganda, made palatable. Young Gordon Craig was forced to recognise that "there is not room in any space for more than will fill that space" and to retire before the blast till time should bring a recurrence of the ideals which were being ousted. Looking on at the long innings of the dramatists of the sociological school, he has expressed the feelings of many in observing that, "All they have done to help us with our own worries is to saddle us with their own". He has shown, in fact, that the error was Mr. Shaw's in supposing that the theatre of vision was not in the highest tradition and of far greater power than the theatre of dialectics, however entertaining.

Actually, the rational dramatists have been more of a publishing success than a theatrical one. Their plays have never drawn the quality of audience which was held by the theatre which they temporarily displaced. No one treasures memories of productions of these plays at all comparable to the memories of performances which sought the Beauty which is Truth.

The abiding spiritual force of the true theatrical power, shines through a recollection which the poet, Thomas Campbell, gives of a venerable old lady whose once vivid faculties were sunk in the torpor of extreme age, who was blind and scarcely ever spoke or expressed any interest in worldly subjects, yet who when once, by chance, the name of Mrs. Siddons was mentioned in her hearing astonished her family by breaking her accustomed silence and speaking with fervour of her memories of the great actress, her face lighting up with enthusiasm though pale with a hundred years. If Mrs. Siddons had been condemned to act reasonably in the reasonable plays of reasonable dramatists she would not have been so remembered.

The salvation of the theatre does not lie in submission to the constraints which the rationalist would put upon it, but in its learning once more to be self-reliant, to extend its boundaries and not to cramp its powers. In teaching this lesson, it may be that Gordon Craig is building for other men to inhabit, but he has already built himself an enduring memorial. He has given the theatre, amongst other things, the basic idea of "a scene with a mobile face"—a scene extending the possible range of the drama and offering a new development. So far he has only been offered, in return, conditions rather worse than he could have had thirty years ago, without ever going "on

strike", conditions under which the scene remains dead. It would be a loss to the theatre and no gain for him to return without having one point allowed him. His first point is still—the *living* scene.

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(At the Sign of the Rose, Hackbridge, Surrey)	1899-1901
<i>A Programme for "Dido and Aeneas,"</i> a booklet with designs	1900-1901
<i>Souvenir of "Acis and Galatea"</i>	1902
<i>A Note on "Rosmerholm,"</i> programme of the Teatro della Pergola, Florence	1906
<i>The Mask</i> , a Journal (Florence)	1908-1915, 1918
Resumed	1923
Publication suspended	1929
<i>The Marionette</i> (Florence)	1918

BOOKS AND PORTFOLIOS

<i>Gordon Craig's Book of Penny Toys</i> (At the Sign of the Rose, Hackbridge, Surrey)	1899
<i>Henry Irving and Ellen Terry</i> , portraits (Stone, Chicago)	1899
<i>Bookplates</i> , a booklet (At the Sign of the Rose, Hackbridge, Surrey)	1900
<i>Die Kunst Des Theaters</i> (Hermann Seeman, Berlin and Leipzig)	1905
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<i>De Kunst van Het Theater</i> (Van Looy, Amsterdam)	1906
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<i>A Portfolio of Etchings</i>	1908
<i>On the Art of the Theatre</i> (Heinemann, London); (Sergel, Chicago)	1911
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<i>De l'art du Théâtre</i> (Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française)	1920
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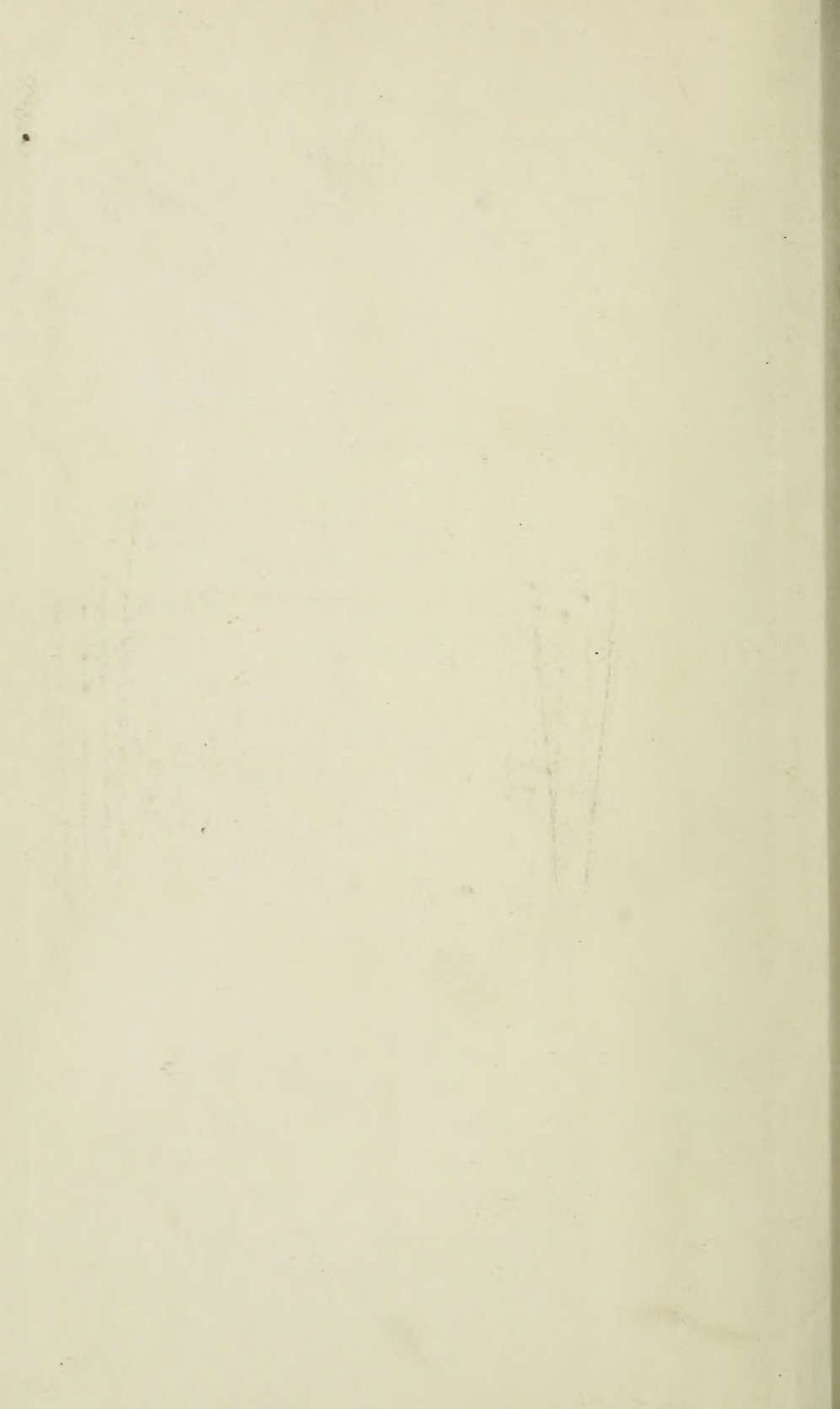
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